

Studies in the Labour Process

Labour Process Theory

Edited by David Knights and Hugh Willmott



STUDIES IN THE LABOUR PROCESS

GENERAL EDITORS: DAVID KNIGHTS, Senior Lecturer in the Manchester School of Management at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology; and HUGH WILLMOTT, Lecturer in the Manchester School of Management at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology

Since the appearance of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, the impact of labour process analysis has been experienced in the fields of industrial sociology, organisation theory, industrial relations, labour economics, politics and business studies. The annual UMIST–Aston Labour Process Conferences have been influential in providing a regular forum for advancing empirical and theoretical analysis in these fields. By combining a selection of papers delivered at these conferences with specially commissioned contributions, the series examines diverse aspects of the employment relationship across the range of productive and service industries. Some volumes explore further the established terrain of management control, the intensification of work, the deskilling of labour. Others are attentive to associated topics such as gender relations at work, new technology, workplace democracy and the international dimensions of the labour process.

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David Knights

*Senior Lecturer in the Manchester School of Management, UMIST,
Manchester*

and

Hugh Willmott

*Lecturer in the Manchester School of Management, UMIST,
Manchester*

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Contents

<i>Notes on the Contributors</i>	vi
1 Introduction	1
2 The Labour Process Debate: A Theoretical Review 1974–1988 <i>Craig R. Littler</i>	46
3 Crawling from the Wreckage: The Labour Process and the Politics of Production <i>Paul Thompson</i>	95
4 Understanding Conflict in the Labour Process: The Logic and Autonomy of Struggle <i>P. K. Edwards</i>	125
5 Labour and Labour Process <i>Mark Wardell</i>	153
6 Managerial Strategies, Activities, Techniques and Technology: Towards a Complex Theory of the Labour Process <i>Andrew Friedman</i>	177
7 A Ghost in the Machine?: The State and the Labour Process in Theory and Practice <i>Dominic Strinati</i>	209
8 Gender and the Labour Process: A Reassessment <i>Jackie West</i>	244
9 Fragmented Labours <i>Gibson Burrell</i>	274
10 Subjectivity, Power and the Labour Process <i>David Knights</i>	297
11 Subjectivity and the Dialectics of Praxis: Opening up the Core of Labour Process Analysis <i>Hugh Willmott</i>	336
<i>Index</i>	379

Notes on the Contributors

Gibson Burrell is Professor of Organisational Behaviour at the University of Warwick. He is currently completing projects with colleagues at the University of Lancaster, including research carried out under the ESRC Competitiveness initiative. He is co-author of *Sociological Paradigms and Organisational Analysis* (with Gareth Morgan).

P. K. Edwards is Principal Research Fellow in the Industrial Relations Research Unit at the University of Warwick. He has conducted research on workplace industrial relations and patterns of industrial conflict. His publications include *Conflict at Work* and *Managing the Factory*.

Andrew Friedman is Lecturer in Economics at the University of Bristol. His current research concerns management strategies and works organisation in Computer Installations, comparing a wide range of countries. He is co-author of *Industry and Labour, Computer Systems Management* (with Dominic Cornford).

David Knights is Senior Lecturer in the School of Management at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. He has conducted research into industrial relations, equal opportunities for ethnic minorities and sex discrimination in recruitment. He has published in sociology and management journals. He is co-author of *Managing the Multi-Racial Workforce* and co-editor of a number of books on the labour process.

Craig R. Littler is Senior Lecturer in the School of Administration, Griffith University, Brisbane. He is the author of numerous articles and books including *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies* and *Class at Work* (with Graham Salaman). He is currently editor of the journal *Labour and Industry*.

Dominic Strinati is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Leicester. He has published articles on the state, industrial relations

and corporatism and is the author of *Capitalism, the State and Industrial Relations*.

Paul Thompson is Professor in the School of Organisation Studies at Lancashire Polytechnic. He is co-author of *The Nature of Work* and *Working the System* (with Eddie Bannon). His current intellectual interests focus upon the development of a critical account of the theory and practice of organisations.

Mark Wardell is Associate Professor of Sociology at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He has published in a variety of sociological journals and is co-editor of *Sociological Theory in Transition*. He is currently studying the relation between class formation and changes in the labour process in the US bituminous coal industry.

Jackie West is Lecturer in Sociology at the University of Bristol. Her main teaching and research interests are in gender relations and economic sociology. She has published articles on various aspects of women's work including class theory, new technology and women returners. She is editor of *Work, Women and the Labour Market*.

Hugh Willmott is Lecturer in the School of Management at the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. His recent research has been on the ESRC-funded studies of accounting regulation and the strategic development of the personnel specialism. He has published in a wide range of social science journals and is co-editor of a number of books on the labour process.

1 Introduction

This volume brings together a number of papers originally delivered at the annual UMIST–Aston Labour Process Conferences. Previous collections have explored a variety of issues within the labour process debate – such as the redesign of jobs, the position of women, the management of labour and the impacts of new technology (Knights *et al.*, 1985; Knights and Willmott, 1986; 1986a; 1987; *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy*, 1986). This volume attends more closely to the theoretical underpinnings of labour process analysis. Through a diverse range of commentaries on the state of labour process theory, it provides an assessment of its viability, offers a variety of proposals for its reconstruction, and suggests a number of directions for its further development.

With some notable (French) exceptions (Mallet, 1975 and especially Gorz, 1967), the foundations of labour process theory laid by Marx (1976) had comparatively little impact upon the study of work before the publication of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974).¹ Seeking to rebut the writings of bourgeois industrial sociologists by re-coupling studies of the workplace with the political economy of class relations (Littler, 1982; and in this volume; Thompson, 1983; Brown, 1984; Open University, 1985), the appearance of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* stimulated numerous empirical and historical studies, the majority of which have addressed one or other of its two central themes: deskilling and strategies of management control (e.g. Zimbalist, 1979; Wood, 1982; Knights *et al.*, 1985; Knights and Willmott, 1986). It also provoked a series of critical reflections upon the theoretical and methodological foundations of labour process analysis (e.g. Aronowitz, 1978; Burawoy, 1978; 1985; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Cutler, 1978; Elger, 1978; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Stark, 1980).

In this introduction, we provide a broad overview of the history of labour process theory before presenting a preview of the individual contributions to the volume. We begin by recalling the foundations of labour process analysis in the work of Marx. We emphasise his attentiveness to the contradiction between labour power and wage labour before sketching his mature analysis of the contradictions within capitalism as a mode of production. We then chart a number

of the critical moments in the development of labour process theory, placing special emphasis on the work of Braverman. In addition, Burawoy's work is singled out for special consideration because, as Clawson and Fantasia (1983: 680) have observed, 'its valuable insights and fresh theoretical perspectives place it head and shoulders above a host of recent "balanced" but pedestrian studies.' Following our review of the development of labour process theorising, from Marx to Burawoy, we provide a résumé of the other chapters, indicating their contribution to a continuing debate.

FOUNDATIONS OF LABOUR-PROCESS ANALYSIS

(i) Labour Power and Wage Labour

In the first volume of *Capital* (1976), Marx presents a radical analysis of the relationship between the creative power of human labour and the capitalist mode of production. As a universal condition of human existence, the exercise of labour power is understood to involve the purposeful appropriation of the materials of nature in order to create products (use values) which satisfy human needs. Marx stresses that this universal process is always socially organised within different historical modes of production – for example, 'whether it is happening under the slave owner's brutal lash or the anxious eye of the capitalist' (ibid.: 290). His purpose is to show how these relations condition the ways in which labour power is actually shaped, organised and controlled to yield humanly valuable outputs (use values).

Marx is especially attentive to relations at the point of production because such a focus allows him to reveal 'not only how capital produces, but *how capital is itself produced*. The secret of profit-making must at last be laid bare' (ibid.: 280; emphasis added). In other words, the analysis of the labour process provides a means of exploding the mystifications surrounding market relations where the 'just equivalence' of exchange obscures the exploitation of labour upon which the sphere of circulation depends. More specifically, by examining the point of production, the most critical (and problematic) factor for the emergence and reproduction of capital² is exposed: namely, the presence of 'free workers' who, lacking the means to produce for themselves, are obliged to sell their labour power to maintain their own material and symbolic existence (and that of their dependants) for the purpose of capital accumulation.³

The distinctive characteristic of capitalism, Marx argues, is the subordination of the human capacity to produce use values to the exploitative demands of the capitalist whose concern is to create products (commodities) which realise in the market an exchange value greater than the cost of the factors of production (materials, tools, wages, and so on). Production for profit rather than need is understood to have a number of distorting effects, not least of which is the substitution of the appearance of value in exchange for the real, human value of what is produced by unalienated labour in response to unmanipulated needs. Using the term ‘valorisation’ to describe the process of pumping surplus value out of labour, Marx argues that it is this which provides the capitalist mode of production with its real ‘driving motive and determining purpose’ (ibid.: 449).

In exploring how the value of human labour is obscured – and therefore increasingly undermined or denied within the capitalist mode of production – Marx anticipates that the control over every aspect of work, experientially as well as technologically, will increasingly be determined by the priorities and demands of capital. As these demands become more insistent, and workers’ control over the productive process of labour is progressively eroded, ‘the workers find themselves confronted by *functions* of the capital that lives in the capitalist’ (Marx, 1976: 1054),⁴ and their experience of work is increasingly one in which ‘the forms of *their own* social labour are utterly independent of the individual workers’ (ibid.). A cogent articulation of this thesis appears in the *Grundrisse* where, drawing a distinction between ‘labour power’ as an infinite creative potential and ‘labour capacity’ (that is, wage labour) as a fixed quantity purchased by the employer,⁵ Marx observes:

in exchange for his labour capacity as a fixed available magnitude, [the worker] surrenders his *creative power*, like Esau his birthright for a mess of pottage. [In doing so] he necessarily impoverishes himself . . . because the creative power of his labour necessarily establishes itself as the power of capital, as an *alien power* confronting him. . . . The separation between labour and property in the product of labour, between labour and wealth, is thus posited in this act of exchange itself. (Marx, 1973: 307)

As workers increasingly become mere wage-labourers who are set to work by others, both the means and the relations of production are experienced as alien, fetishised powers. Since the continuation of the

capitalist mode of production is also conditional – or so Marx argues – upon a *concealment of the process of valorisation* in the everyday exchange of commodities (including labour), a key task of his critique is to dispel this fetishism of commodities: to show how what *appears* to participants as ‘the fantastic form of a relation between things’ is, in *reality*, the expression of social relations between sensuous human beings (Marx, 1976: 165).⁶ In this light, a fundamental concern of his analysis is to expose and explore the contradictions inherent in the capitalist labour process whereby the ‘real’ material relations of production are subsumed under, and subordinated to, their appearance in relations of exchange. It is this inversion, and its legitimisation in ideologies of ‘just exchange’, which conceals from labour the true value of its power and facilitates the continued private appropriation of socialised production.

(ii) Dynamics of Capitalist Development

The organising logic of the capitalist mode of production, Marx argues, requires that surplus is appropriated from labour by paying it less than the value it adds in the labour process. Once labour is at the disposal of capital, a variety of strategies may be developed for ensuring that the purchase of labour power results in the realisation of productive effort, an effort that is essential if the capitalist mode of production is to be sustained. For example, capital may seek a cut in the real value of wages or prolong the length of the working day, thereby increasing the difference between the cost of factors of production and the exchange value of the goods produced. Alternatively, where such simple strategies meet their limits, or where labour successfully organises to resist such demands, capital is obliged to reorganise the method of production or to introduce ‘labour-saving’ machinery. However, such strategies may themselves be insufficient to realise a surplus – for example, where competitive pressures are exerted upon the rate of profit which can be extracted from labour, where the cost of capital prohibits investment, or where capital’s dependence upon (especially skilled) workers constrains management’s efforts to intensify and/or discipline the labour process. Accordingly, capitalism is in a continuous state of flux characterised by ‘constant revolutionising of production’ and ‘everlasting uncertainty and agitation’ (Marx and Engels, 1970: 38).

When focusing upon the competitive pressures upon capital to redesign the labour process in order to secure the extraction of

surplus value, Marx anticipates that the revolutionising of capitalist production first takes the form of a transfer and (uneven) development of traditional, craft methods of manufacture within the social organisation of the factory. However, the logic of the capitalist mode of production continuously promotes a search for more productive methods of working – for example, through the development of labour-saving machinery and the design of more intensive methods of working. Marx illustrates this dynamic of change by describing a factory where, initially, work is organised in a way that allows each person to use his or her skills to create a complete product. ‘External circumstances’ then disrupt this pattern – for example, by requiring an increased quantity of the product to be delivered by a given time. In response to these pressures from the market, the labour process is ‘temporarily’ changed by creating a more specialised, fragmented division of tasks. Once established, the new pattern, referred to as ‘the collective worker’, is then maintained and extended so long as it continues to yield a competitive advantage of improved control/productivity (cf. Littler, in this volume).⁷ As a consequence,

Instead of each man being allowed to perform all the various operations in succession, these operations are changed into disconnected isolated ones, carried on side by side; each is assigned to a different craftsman, and the whole of them together are performed simultaneously by the co-operators. This accidental division is repeated, develops advantages of its own and gradually ossifies into a systematic division of labour. (Marx, 1976: 456; see also 458–9)

Market pressures, reflecting ‘the imperative of valorisation’, promote a continuous cycle of innovation and rationalisation. In response to competition the capitalist arranges for work to be done efficiently and correctly, with the result that the task of ‘directing, superintending and adjusting becomes one of the functions of capital’ (ibid.: 449). It is with this development in the forces of production that the fruits of socialised (that is, collective) labour increasingly take on a fetishised form of having the *appearance* of ‘the productive power of capital’ (ibid.: 1024; emphasis omitted). Or, as Marx puts it, ‘The mystification implicit in the relations of capital as a whole is greatly intensified far beyond the point it had reached or could have reached in the merely formal subsumption of labour under capital’ (ibid.: 1024).

With the constant revolutionising of production, a number of less efficient/flexible/fortunate capitalists are continuously shaken out of the market. This 'shake-out' is not dysfunctional for capital. Indeed, this process is essential if the overall rate of extraction of surplus from labour is to be maintained or improved. For labour, in contrast, the price extracted is frequently an intensification of 'the discipline and command of capital' (ibid.: 481), often disguised through 'a more refined and civilised means of exploitation' (ibid.: 486).

From this perspective, both capitalist and worker are seen to become 'enslaved by the relationships of capitalism' (ibid.: 990). But whereas the capitalist 'finds absolute satisfaction' (ibid.) by increasing his wealth from the exploitation of labour, the worker fast becomes 'a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as if in a forcing-house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations' (ibid.: 481). However, the worker is also characterised as 'a victim who confronts [this relationship] as a rebel and *experiences* it as a process of enslavement' (emphasis added). Drawing attention to the presence of resistance and counter-measures in animating the dynamics of the capitalist mode of production, Marx observes that:

As the number of the co-operating workers increases, so too does their resistance to the domination of capital, and necessarily, the pressure put on by capital to overcome this resistance. The control exercised by the capitalist is not only a special function arising from the nature of the social labour process, and peculiar to that process, but is at the same time a function of the exploitation of a social labour process, and is consequently conditioned by the unavoidable antagonism between the exploiter and the raw materials of his exploitation. (ibid.: 449)

Despite being systematically disadvantaged within capitalist relations of production, the worker is neither impotent nor ineffectual. As a *worker* s/he is crippled; but as a *wage-labourer*, s/he has many opportunities for organising to resist a system that subordinates the exercise of labour power to the demands of capital. The very structure of the capital-labour relationship presents the opportunity for exploiting capital's dependence upon labour. Indeed, the increasing interdependence of labour within a socialised system of production strengthens its productive power and anticipates a future independence from the private appropriations of the capitalist. Exacer-

bated by the systemic instabilities of the capitalist mode of production (for example, declining rate of profit, crises of overproduction), labour's experience of enslavement is declared to create 'the real premises of a new mode of production, one that abolishes the contradictory form of capitalism' (ibid.: 1065). In short, a combination of structural crises and a heightened class-consciousness, both of which are generated from the contradictions inherent within the capitalist mode of production, coincide to produce a new (socialist) order in which the organisation of the labour process is consistent with the socialised nature of production.

LABOUR IN THE ERA OF MONOPOLY CAPITAL

In *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman seeks to retrieve and update Marx's critiques of the capitalist labour process through an attack upon bourgeois accounts of work in 'industrial society'. Although Braverman's primary focus is the degradation of work in the twentieth century, which he associates with the relentless tightening of management control, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* also contains at least two other rather loosely related elements: an outline of developments in the wider organisation of 'monopoly capitalist' societies⁸ and an examination of changes in their occupational and class structures. In this section, we first sketch the substantive content of Braverman's work before attending more closely to its theoretical foundations.

Building upon Marx's analysis of the dynamics of capitalist development, Braverman explores how the application of modern management techniques, in combination with mechanisation and automation, secures the real subordination of labour and deskilling of work in the office as well as on the shop floor (Braverman, 1974: 195ff.; 424 ff.). More specifically, he suggests that the separation of the conception (management) from the execution (labour) of tasks, including the tasks of management,⁹ provides the driving motive for the modern organisation and control of the labour process (ibid.: 195 ff.). The removal of all forms of control from the worker, he asserts, is 'the ideal towards which management tends, and in pursuit of which it uses and shapes every productive innovation furnished by science' (ibid.: 171-2).

The single most important development in the capitalist organisation of work during the past century, Braverman contends, is the

increasing ‘rigor with which [tasks] are divided from one another, and then increasingly subdivided, so that conception is concentrated, insofar as possible, in ever more limited groups within management or closely associated with it’ (ibid.: 125). Dismissing the suggestion that (bourgeois) ideologies of work (for example, human-relations thinking) may play a critical role in mediating the relationship between capital and labour (ibid.: 142 ff.), Braverman identifies Taylorism as the form of control that ‘render[s] conscious and systematic, the formerly unconscious tendency of capitalist production’ (ibid.: 120–1)¹⁰. The traditional content of skill is destroyed, and an increasingly homogeneous working population is created which is excluded from entering the ranks of management:

The breakup of craft skills and the reconstruction of production as a collective or social process have destroyed the traditional concept of skill and opened up only one way for mastery over labor processes to develop: in and through scientific, technical and engineering knowledge. But the extreme concentration of this knowledge in the hands of management and its closely associated staff organizations have closed this avenue to the working population. What is left to workers is a reinterpreted and woefully inadequate concept of skill: specific dexterity, a limited and repetitious operation, ‘speed as skill’, etc. (Braverman, 1974: 443–4)

In the second half of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman surveys the conditions and consequences of other effects of the rapid accumulation of capital in the monopoly era. Chapters (of variable length and substance) are devoted to an examination of the growing scale and changing structure of the modern corporation, the development and servicing of vastly expanded markets,¹¹ the complexity and sophistication of internal planning and the dependence of consumers upon a universal market for all their (commodified) needs (for example, leisure, care), a development which tends to undercut the traditional role of the family and community. Braverman also notes the growing influence of the state in regulating every sphere of the economy, the massive expansion of clerical industries and office computerisation, the increasing proportion of labour devoted to the accounting and realisation of values, the construction of a dual labour market through the casualisation of labour as well as through the selective employment of women, ethnic minorities, ‘guest’ workers, and so on. Although it is implied that all these developments have

implications for the organisation and control of labour process, these are left largely unexplicated, perhaps because the relentless application of Taylorism is assumed to be the dominant influence.

Throughout *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman is attentive to the changing nature of the 'objective' class composition and its implications for class struggle, a concern which originally prompted the study. In particular he highlights the expansion of clerical, technical and managerial labour, which are described as 'a range of intermediate categories' (ibid.: 405) enjoying a 'privileged market position' (ibid.: 407). Occupations included in these intermediate groupings are draughtsmen, technicians, engineers, accountants, nurses, teachers, supervisors, foremen, petty managers, and so forth. These 'middle layers' of employment, Braverman argues, cannot sensibly be included amongst members of senior management who 'act "professionally" for capital' or as any 'part of the class that personifies capital and employs labour' (ibid.: 405), neither can they be classified as members of the class whose labour they 'help to control, command and organize' (ibid.: 405). However, because the dynamics of capitalist development demand that their work is continuously subjected to a process of fragmentation and degradation, it is anticipated that workers in these growing intermediate groupings will increasingly experience their work in ways that strengthen their affinity with 'the mass of working-class employment' (ibid.: 408; see also 423):

In such occupations, the proletarian form begins to assert itself and to impress itself upon the consciousness of these employees. Feeling the insecurities of their role as sellers of labor power and the frustrations of a controlled and mechanically organized workplace, they begin, despite their remaining privileges, to know those symptoms of dissociation which are popularly called 'alienation' and which the working class has lived with for so long that they have become part of its second nature. (Braverman, 1974: 408)

This brings us to a consideration of the aspect of Braverman's work that is of most theoretical significance: the self-imposed restriction of his analysis to 'the "objective" content of class and its omission of the "subjective" ' (ibid.: 27). This limitation does not, of itself, reflect a denial of the importance of the subjective dimension of class. On the contrary, Braverman observes that it is 'only through consciousness that a class becomes an actor on the historic stage' (ibid.: 29); and

later he stresses that classes ‘are not fixed entities but rather *ongoing processes*’ (ibid.: 409).¹² However, the omission of the subjective content of class does reflect a *theoretical* premiss that what is ‘objective’ in respect of ‘the shape given to the working population’ can usefully be separated and analysed *independently* of the ‘subjective’ – the subjective content of class being equated with the development of consciousness and organisation in the accomplishment of revolutionary change. Much of the critical response directed at *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has questioned the viability of this separation, arguing that its effect is to neglect the process of struggle in which the so-called ‘objective’ contents of class, including the forms of management control, are shaped and reproduced. Arguably, Braverman concentrates on the ‘objective’ dimension of class on the grounds that the development of a class *for itself* is conditional upon the objective conditions (for example, deskilling and degradation) which ferment this revolutionary consciousness. However, as we shall see, in neglecting the ‘subjective’ dimension of class, this approach has been criticised for fetishising the process of capitalist development.

CRITIQUES OF BRAVERMAN

Despite a warm appreciation of the contribution of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* to the renewal of Marxist analysis of work, Braverman’s critics have been unsparing in their attacks on its central theses. Here we will limit our review to criticisms directed at four interrelated elements in Braverman’s argument: deskilling, management strategy, the full circuit of capital, and the ontology of class relations.¹³

(i) Deskilling

To recapitulate briefly: Braverman’s thesis on deskilling is founded upon the assumption that the continuing accumulation of capital depends upon an appropriation of the customs, knowledge and skills of labour. Through the application of Taylorism, craft work (including the skilled labour of clerks) is progressively reduced to the status of detailed labour. A large number of deficiencies have been identified in this thesis. It is criticised for romanticising craft work (Cutler, 1978) and the position of craft labour in industry (Stedman-Jones, 1975; Littler, 1982); for abstracting the processes of deskilling

from the specific material and ideological conditions that favour this line of development (Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977; Elger, 1982); for playing down the significance of contradictions associated with strategies that rely heavily upon the degradation of labour – such as the promotion of unions (especially in periods when productivity increases are less heavily dependent upon the substitution of capital for labour through mechanisation or automation), the loss of flexibility in manufacturing and the tendency for the rate of profit to fall in industries where the organic composition of capital is increasing (eg Nichols and Beynon, 1977); and for failing to appreciate how contradictions and resistance are not merely a consequence of efforts to deskill work but have a significant effect in shaping and directing the selection and pursuit of alternative strategies of accumulation (Palmer, 1975; Friedman, 1977).

By equating the possession of skill with the absence of tight control and the capacity for resistance, Braverman has also come under attack for overlooking the extent to which the 'real' subordination of labour actually depends upon the retention or creation of skills (Penn, 1982) and for marginalising the significance of opportunities for resistance where work is deskilled. Others have criticised his neglect of the presence and subjective importance of 'tacit' skills, such as knowledge of the idiosyncracies of particular machines (Manwaring and Wood, 1985), for being inattentive to the operation of external and internal labour markets (Rubery, 1980) and for focusing exclusively upon waged work to the neglect of domestic activity (Beechey, 1982; Knights and Willmott, 1986).

Given this welter of criticism, it is worth noting that many of these criticisms are directed at a level of fine-grained detail which was beyond the scope of Braverman's analysis. *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, it should be remembered, was intended to provide an overview of trends and a stimulus for the revitalisation of critical studies of work and class, not to present a precise specification of the organisation and control of each and every form of capitalist labour process. With this in mind, it is worth recording that at least one influential commentator concludes his review of these criticisms by agreeing with the kernel of Braverman's thesis: that workers' skills 'are normally an obstacle to the full utilisation of the means of production by capital' and (therefore) that deskilling 'remains the major *tendential* presence within the development of the capitalist labour process' (Thompson, 1983: 118). New skills are continuously thrown up by the constant revolutionising of production, but as soon

as they are developed these skills become vulnerable to the same revolutionising process which, in the absence of more (subjectively) attractive opportunities for capital accumulation, stimulates a strategic reduction of costs and dependencies associated with their reproduction.

(ii) Management Strategy

Here the main thrust of criticism is directed at Braverman's exclusive identification of the principles of Taylorism, involving an extensive separation of conception and execution, with the strategy for designing work and controlling labour actually favoured and implemented by management. For example, Edwards (1979) has argued that management has increasingly favoured 'bureaucratic' forms of control in which greater emphasis is placed upon the incorporation of the workforce, through the provision of 'enlightened' personnel policies and the semblance of a career structure, than upon the simple fragmentation and intensification of work tasks. In a parallel critique of Braverman's concentration on 'direct', Taylorian forms of control, Friedman (1977: 80) has argued that *Labor and Monopoly Capital*

must be criticised for confusing one *particular strategy* for exercising managerial authority in the capitalist labour process with *managerial authority* itself . . . Taylorian scientific management is not the only strategy available for exercising managerial authority, and given the reality of worker resistance, often it is not the most appropriate.

Friedman (1977) identifies an alternative strategy of 'Responsible Autonomy' which may halt, complement or reverse the degradation of work by favouring a redesign of jobs that offers greater scope for the exercise of discretion and 'self-management'. Moves in this direction are likely to grow, Friedman suggests, because they enable (monopoly) firms to retain the more skilled members of the workforce and to achieve improvements in flexibility (that is, productivity) through the introduction of new working arrangements (cf. Nichols and Beynon, 1977).

More fundamentally, Braverman's analysis of management control has been criticised for embracing 'a strong strain of Marxist functionalism' (Littler and Salaman, 1982: 256). Not only Braverman but also others such as Edwards (1979) and Friedman (1977) are said to fall

victim to a Panacea Fallacy in which it is assumed that one strategy (for example, Taylorism/Direct Control) or another (for example, Human Relations/Responsible Autonomy) serves to contain or even overcome contradictions inherent within the capitalist mode of production. Increasingly, the importance of appreciating the development of management strategies towards labour in relation to other 'contingencies', such as the dynamics of product markets and the organisation of internal and external labour markets, is emphasised. Instead of reducing the dynamics of management control to one or two strategies, many commentators are stressing the importance of appreciating the coexistence of differing dimensions, mechanisms and levels of control that mediate particular capital-labour relations (Thompson, 1983; Storey, 1985; Friedman, in this volume). Finally, it is being argued that strategic efforts to (re)organise and control the labour process are best understood as a political process in which management is no more unified and omniscient than workers are inert and impotent (Salaman, 1982).

(iii) The Full Circuit of Capital

This criticism attacks what it regards as the parochialism of labour process analysis. In the era of monopoly capitalism, it is argued, there are cheaper and more effective ways of ensuring a satisfactory yield on capital employed than by directly intensifying the productivity of labour (Morgan and Hooper, 1987). These include monopoly pricing, sales and marketing efforts, currency speculation, asset stripping, relocation of production to cheap labour markets, credit manipulation, and so on. When set in this wider context, the redesign of work is seen to be driven less by the intent to control and discipline labour than, for example, a concern with the quality and delivery of the product. Accordingly, it has been suggested that a more fruitful approach to theorising the redesign of work can be developed by examining contradictions within and between the moments in the circuit of capital. Kelly (1985: 32), for example, has observed how capitalism

is defined not only by the status of labour as commodity and by the sale of labour power to capital, but by the buying and selling of all goods as commodities in markets. . . . In other words we need to consider the *full circuit* of industrial capital as the starting point for analyses of changes in the division of labour: purchase of labour

power; extraction of surplus value within the labour process; realisation of surplus value within product markets. There is no sound theoretical reason for privileging one moment in this circuit – the labour–capital relation within the labour process – if our objective is to account for changes (or variations) in the division of labour.

To illustrate this thesis, Kelly explores post-war changes in the electrical engineering industry in Britain and the USA. During this period, he argues, there was a growing contradiction between a strategy of diversifying product ranges and an organisation of the labour process in assembly lines designed for the continuous manufacture of one product. This resulted in three types of response, all of which precipitated further contradictions. One strategy involved restricting the extension of product ranges, combined with built-in obsolescence and reduced price. Another involved replacing multi-product plants with product specialisation within given plants, a strategy that facilitated rationalisation through plant closure. A third response was to reorganise flowlines so that each worker assembles a larger part of the product, a strategy associated with both improved individual incentives and an increase of jobs that were ‘enriched’ or ‘humanised’ (Wrenn, 1982).

Reflecting upon the attractiveness to management of the third strategy, which combines dimensions of Taylorian (eg individual incentives tied to work measurement) and non-Taylorian (eg the unification of tasks and some measure of work autonomy) principles of job design, Kelly argues that its adoption can be explained in terms of its contribution to attenuating both the contradictions between the nature of the product market (diversified product ranges) and the organisation of the labour process (ie the use of shorter lines or individual work stations to produce long runs), as well as the contradictions between the labour process and the labour market (the reduction of worker interdependence minimised disruption associated with labour shortage, absenteeism and turnover). In this light, forms of job redesign that incorporate elements which directly contradict Taylorian principles are not seen as inconsistent and abortive efforts at manipulation which have ‘little real impact upon the management of worker or work’ (Braverman, 1974: 145, *sic*). Instead, where the relationship between capital and labour is formulated as one that expresses complex contradictions rather than simple antagonisms, the redesign of jobs is viewed as a response to contra-

dictions within and between moments in the circuit of capital that have effects which are beneficial as well as detrimental to workers and management alike (cf. Burawoy, 1979; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980).

(iv) The Ontology of Class Relations

As noted earlier, Braverman's study is confined within an objectivist framework in which the 'subjective dimension' of class is simply bracketed out of the analysis.¹⁴ Since the subjective content of class is equated exclusively with the consciousness, organisation and activities of a class for itself (ibid.: 27), it is perhaps unsurprising that Braverman omits consideration of the presence of subjectivity in the unfolding of 'the scientific-technical revolution'. This omission is graphically exposed by Burawoy (1979; 1985) when recalling his immediate reaction to *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, whose publication coincided with his period of participant observation as a machine operator:

At the time it failed to speak to my experiences on the shopfloor, to get at what work meant to me and my fellow operators. We were constructing a shopfloor life of our own that took for granted what Braverman bemoaned: the separation of conception from execution. Our jobs may have had little skill in Braverman's sense, but they involved ingenuity enough. They absorbed our attention and sometimes even left us with too much autonomy. Uncertainty could be as nerve-wracking as it was seductive. Objectification of work, if that is what we were experiencing, is very much a subjective process – it cannot be reduced to some inexorable laws of capitalism. We participated in and strategized our own exploitation. That, and not the destruction of subjectivity, was what was so remarkable. (Burawoy, 1985: 10)

The significance of the subjective, Burawoy suggests, lies as much in explaining labour's compliance with the demands of capital as in exposing the presence and significance of antagonism. Describing Braverman's distinction between the subjective and objective aspects of class as arbitrary, Burawoy argues that it lies at the root of a number of the deficiencies within *Labor and Monopoly Capital* discussed above:

Just as a reliance on the 'objective' aspects of the labour process prevents Braverman from understanding the day-to-day impact of particular forms of 'control', and specifically Taylorism, so the same one-sided perspective leads him to compound Taylorism as ideology and as practice. The same focus also precludes an explanation of the historical tendencies and variations in the labour process. . . . In the process, he makes all sorts of assumptions about the interests of capitalists and managers, about their consciousness, and about their capacity to impose their interests on subordinate classes. (Burawoy, 1985: 25)

Critical of Braverman's objectivistic and economistic framework, Burawoy develops an approach in which any work context is understood to involve three 'inseparable' dimensions: 'an economic dimension (production of things), a political dimension (production of social relations), and an ideological dimension (production of an experience of those relations)' (ibid.: 39). From this standpoint, an explanation of the reproduction of the labour process in capitalist society is not reducible to the 'inexorable laws of capitalism'; nor can it be taken for granted that the interests of capital and labour are pre-established and always antagonistic. Burawoy's contention, in contrast, is that class interests are defined and organised through struggles on the terrain of politics and ideology and that in practice the interests of capital and labour can be co-ordinated, albeit it in ways that are precarious for both parties (ibid.: 28–9; 46–7).¹⁵ In this light, workers' experience of work cannot be adequately interpreted (and readily rationalised) as an epiphenomenon of the objective conditions which cloud or distort their perception of their real interests. Influenced by the writings of Gramsci, Poulantzas and Althusser, Burawoy (1985) argues that their analyses of politics and ideology are of direct relevance for understanding how, in the context of monopoly capitalist society, the interests of workers and management are 'concretely coordinated' on the shop floor:

Their analyses of hegemony – the presentation of the dominant classes as the interests of all, the constitution of the popular class state, the construction of the power bloc, the disorganization of subordinate classes, the relative autonomy of the law and so forth – all appeared as germane to the factory as to the sphere of public power. Thus, collective bargaining concretely coordinated

the interests of workers and management, the grievance machinery constituted workers as individual citizens with rights and obligations, and the internal labour market produced a possessive individualism right there on the shopfloor. (ibid.: 10)

The most decisive effect of the hegemonic form of regime, Burawoy contends, is its promotion of 'a balance of power' in which management is restrained from imposing authoritarian controls typical of previous, despotic regimes.¹⁶ Moreover, because this form of regime 'gave workers the opportunity to construct effective working relations and drew them into the pursuit of capitalist profit', it 'first and foremost set limits on workers' struggles' (ibid.: 10). In the context of a hegemonic factory regime, labour is much more inclined to accept the separation of conception from execution and to use the space that remains for the exercise of creativity to derive '*relative* satisfactions', often taking the form of games, from a deprived work experience (Burawoy, 1979).¹⁷

In Burawoy's account of the hegemonic regime, these 'playful' satisfactions are not merely incidental. Rather, they are central to the way in which labour is involved in reproducing capitalist relations of production. This is because the hegemonic regime provides and preserves a space in which the game of 'making-out' is played – a game that has 'the effect of generating consent to its rules and of obscuring the conditions [i.e. the relations of exploitation] that framed them' (Burawoy, 1985: 11).¹⁸ Indeed, in Burawoy's view the most significant mystification of the expropriation of unpaid labour occurs at the point of production, where the ideological effect of engaging in games and other playful activities is to focus workers' attention upon the opportunities for autonomy and pleasure in a way that 'take[s] "extraneous" conditions (such as having to come to work) as unchangeable and unchanging' (ibid.: 38).¹⁹

In stressing the importance of the ideological and political dimensions of monopoly capitalism, Burawoy concurs with other critics of Braverman who have concluded that analyses of control in the labour-process debate have suffered from 'an excessive interest . . . in methods and techniques as they affect the worker at the point of production' (Littler and Salaman, 1982: 264), and partially with the view that 'the subordination of labour, real or otherwise, cannot be understood at the level of the labour process' (ibid.: 266). However, whereas Littler and Salaman, for example, suggest that the focus of attention should be switched to an examination of the control

implications of decisions taken elsewhere in the organisation, and indeed outside it, Burawoy argues that analysis should incorporate an appreciation of this wider context while remaining steadfastly centred upon the labour process at the point of production. This is because, in his assessment (and here he is a direct descendant of Marx and Braverman), the organisation and control of the labour process is what 'decisively shapes the development of working class struggles' (Burawoy, 1985: 7). More specifically, Burawoy anticipates that as the despotic or coercive face of hegemonic regimes becomes more transparent, labour may come to realise that its interests are served only partially and precariously by the capitalist mode of production – a view recently echoed by Hyman, who suggests that:

The new disciplines imposed on workers can be expected – particularly if market conditions improve or become accepted as the new normalcy – to provoke unpredictable and disruptive forms of revolt: the more explosive because of the absence of 'legitimate' institutional restraints, or because the existing representative institutions are viewed as excessively collaborative. (Hyman, 1987: 52)

In common with that of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, the reception of Burawoy's work has been both favourable and highly critical (see Peck, 1982; Gartman, 1982, 1983; Clawson and Fantasia, 1983; Thompson, 1983; Knights and Collinson, 1985; Harris, 1987). For example, it has been argued that his examination of 'consent' is inadequately linked to an understanding of shifts in the balance of power; that the surface features of collaboration (for example, participation in games) may underplay the importance of money as an incentive and conceal undercurrents of conflict; that the equation of Marx's analysis with market despotism overlooks his more general writings on ideology and the state; that an abstract and sketchy treatment of the wider context of production politics leads him to generalise too quickly from his observations of the machine shop at Allied to the widespread, if uneven development of hegemonic regimes; that his predilection for structuralist Marxism minimises the significance of class struggle in the organisation of labour processes and promotes a disheartened politics of despair; that his incantation of the requirement of capital to secure and obscure the extraction of surplus value itself conceals the lack of an adequate account of how and why workers routinely reproduce the relations of production through which they are exploited. Yet despite this range of critical

comment, the innovativeness of Burawoy's work is likely to provide an important beacon for theoretical development in labour process analysis.

ADVANCING THE DEBATE

We have noted how the appearance of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* aroused considerable interest, stimulating a desire both to build and to improve upon Braverman's own formulations. Given the breadth and depth of these criticisms and the absence of consensus on a substitute framework, it is not surprising to find reports of commentators who conclude that 'the labour process bandwagon . . . is now holed and patched beyond further repair' (Storey, 1985: 194). The contributors to this volume similarly identify a number of the weaknesses in the work of Braverman and those who have been influenced by him, but they seek to use the studies that comprise the labour process bandwagon as prototypes from which a more robust theory of the organisation and control of the labour process may be constructed, and to indicate a number of directions in which this bandwagon may yet be pushed.

The contributors present a variety of assessments of the significance and value of 'labour process theory'. Approaching this intellectual tradition from a range of perspectives and with different foci of concern, each seeks to remedy its deficiencies by building upon its strengths. The first four chapters – by Littler, Thompson, Edwards and Wardell – are concerned, in different ways, to develop a more adequate general theory for understanding the organisation of work in advanced capitalist societies through a consideration of its relevance for examining particular issues (for example, management control). The three chapters that follow are less concerned with the development of a general theory than with the adequacy of theory for grasping central issues of the debate – namely managerial strategies (Friedman), the state and politics (Strinati) and gender (West). Finally, each of the remaining chapters – by Burrell, Knights, and Willmott – is concerned to introduce fresh theoretical insights in an effort to interpret the course of the labour process debate and to suggest new directions for its development.

Craig Littler argues that there is an urgent need for the reconceptualisation of how the labour process is organised and controlled. He begins by suggesting that labour process theory provides the basis for an integrated approach to the study of work. Identifying three major strands in this theory – changes in the skills of labour, the operation of labour markets and the exercise of management control – he suggests that the most central issue concerns the formulation of the concept of management control. The basic deficiency of Braverman's conceptualisation of control, Littler argues, is the assumption of management's strategic determination 'to alienate the process of production from the worker' (Braverman, 1974: 58).

Littler's detailed exploration of the literature on management strategy and control is attentive to a variety of issues. These include the diversity of interpretations concerning the rationality of management action, the relationship between intentions and their consequences, the importance of management's control over labour relative to other strategic activity, the significance of (for example) legislation and the adequacy of existing conceptualisations of the range of possible strategies. Concluding that the existing literature provides a confused and often simplistic account of the nature and dynamics of the control relationship, he compares and contrasts contradictions in this relationship within capitalist and state socialist economies. This leads him to contend that the structure of labour markets, and particularly the extent to which jobs are secure, shapes the nature of the control dynamic. Also emphasised are the possibilities for – and effectiveness of – monitoring the performance (effort) of workers. For, when limited by both its knowledge and the availability of the requisite resources, management is obliged to engage 'informal' methods which depend, above all, upon the (compliant) subjectivity of the workforce.

Littler concludes that a reconceptualisation of the labour process is needed because Marxian/Bravermanian analysis cannot account satisfactorily for 'the great variety of economic and sociological activities which occur at the workplace'. He urges that it be 'recomposed' by replacing an allegedly narrow focus upon the point of production with an analysis that accommodates a broader model of management, including interventions by the state as well as an appreciation of the logics of technological and organisational efficiency and the shifting patterns of economic development.

Paul Thompson presents an alternative reconstruction of the history of labour process analysis in which studies of deskilling as well as management control are critically examined. He does not endorse Littler's 're-composition' of labour-process theory by adding or incorporating a series of factors which are alleged to be marginal or to be misrepresented in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Instead, critical of recent trends in the sociology of work and industrial relations which employ a veneer of labour process terminology and managerialise labour process analysis, Thompson argues for a return to the core of labour process theory. This core, he argues, does not consist of the theses on deskilling and managerial controls, as many commentators are said – mistakenly – to believe. Rather, its theoretical distinctiveness resides in its centralising of the unique characteristics of labour as a commodity: its potential to produce value and the indeterminacy which surrounds the harnessing of this potential (see Friedman, in this volume). Without a return to this core, Thompson argues, there is a danger of losing sight of its theoretical foundations as it becomes entangled in the identification of numerous factors that can be associated with the organisation and control of specific labour processes. While he accepts that *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is imperfect in a number of respects, Thompson's response is to consider what can be learnt from such analysis in an effort to develop a theory of the labour process which retains its emancipatory intent.

On this basis, Thompson identifies four key features that are relevant for the analysis of the capitalist mode of production. The *first* element concerns the recognition that surpluses are derived from labour and appropriated by capital. This, Thompson suggests, justifies the privileging of the capital–labour relation as the central focus for an analysis of production. In this light, reference to 'the full circuit of capital' is seen to be 'extremely useful' so long as it is not counterposed to analysis at the point of production and/or used 'to downgrade an emphasis on control, conflict and the capital–labour relation'. *Second*, competition between producers, combined with antagonism between capital and labour, promotes the continuous transformation of labour process. *Third*, in order to secure this transformation, capital must retain control, although there is no requirement for this control to take any specific form (compare Edwards's notion of 'general control', in this volume). Drawing a distinction between struggles of resistance that are focused upon the wage–effort bargain and the frontier of control in work relations and struggles of transformation which are directed at the more 'global'

issues (for example, those concerning the ownership, appropriation and distribution of surplus product), Thompson argues that global issues can be brought to bear on production politics as, for example, during the British coal industry dispute of 1984–5 when a politics of resistance in the defence of jobs combined with a politics of transformation that challenged the form of state economic planning.

As a consequence of the imperative to control the conditions of work and maximise capital's side of the wage–effort exchange, the *fourth* element of labour process theory understands forms of conflict and resistance to be endemic to capitalist relations of production. Here Thompson is critical of those who suggest that the structural conditions of capitalist production only 'permit' conflict and do not engender it, but he also concedes that it is here that 'the most substantial modification to the core theory must be made'. For it must be appreciated that a condition of effective transformations of the labour process is often the co-operation of labour and that, for this reason, 'at some level . . . workers' co-operation, creative and productive powers, and consent must be engaged and mobilised'. This, he notes, requires the construction of a full theory of 'the missing subject' – a task described as probably the greatest facing labour process theory (see Knights and Willmott, both in this volume). In combining these four elements, Thompson recommends that the labour process should be theorised as 'a specific set of structures and practices that intersects with practices deriving from other social relations'. Burawoy's (1985) distinction between politics within the arena of production and other, intersecting forms of politics (for example, in relation to consumption, gender, state) is seen to provide a valuable set of guidelines for analysis. But Thompson, in common with Littler, is critical of Burawoy's periodisation of regimes, not only because it falls victim to the Panacea Fallacy (Littler and Salaman, 1982) but also because it suggests that in modern forms of regime (hegemonic and hegemonic despotism) conditions for resistance 'appear to be at best minimal'. As a result, Burawoy too is obliged to make a leap of faith when he anticipates that working-class demobilisation may actually stimulate a demand for socialist transformation.

Thompson's alternative is to link counter-planning at the level of the shop floor to a reworked alternative economic strategy at the level of the local and national state. In contrast with other responses which involve a leap of faith and/or a heavier reliance upon corporatist arrangements and the designs of experts (e.g. Boreham *et al.*,

1985; Clegg and Higgins, 1985), the merit of this formulation, Thompson argues, is that it is worker-driven. So although Thompson abandons the Marxist orthodoxy in which the analysis of the capitalist labour process is wedded to a theory of transformation through an inevitable process of class struggle, and concedes that it is not possible to know what 'the nature and end-product of worker emancipation should, can or will be', he argues strongly for the retention of a theory that is informed by a commitment to the development of 'ideas and practices that empower workers and their organisations'.

Paul Edwards also focuses upon the analysis of conflict and the conceptualisation of control. In common with Littler and Thompson, he is critical of analyses which assume clear managerial strategies, reduce capitalist development to crises of labour control and/or disregard informal modes of accommodation. In their place, he seeks to develop a theoretical framework in which the voluntarism of action is situated within structures of domination and subordination. To this end, he argues for a theory of the labour process which neither assumes an impersonal logic of capitalist development nor veers towards a voluntarism in which the negotiation of order and the manufacture of consent appear as principles capable of counteracting the exploitative nature of capitalist production (see Wardell and Knights, in this volume).

Edwards's proposed alternative involves a recognition that social order is negotiated (between managers and workers) within historically emergent structures of domination and subordination. Employing the term 'structured antagonism' to characterise the exploitative and contradictory relation of capital to labour, Edwards argues that it is chosen in order to avoid imputing 'real interests' to actors (for example, workers and managers) and to resist viewing the capital-labour relation as the source of all conflict at the workplace. In this light, negotiation of social order is seen to involve choices which are not freely made but are dependent upon the responses of managers and workers to 'the structured antagonism that simultaneously unites and divides them'. Despite his reference to other sources of conflict, Edwards shares with Thompson a retention of the understanding that 'the basic conflict of interest between capital and labour', expressed in 'the dialectical interplay of structure and

action', remains central to theorising the organisation and control of capitalist labour processes.

Much of Edwards's chapter is devoted to the clarification and more precise definition of terms and to making some analytical distinctions. Echoing Littler's attention to the significance of forces that impact upon the point of production, a distinction is drawn between 'social formation' and 'mode of production' in order to highlight the ways in which the organisation and development of particular labour processes are mediated by a variety of factors, including policies pursued by the state, managerial strategies, union traditions, and so forth. Responses to contradictions within the capitalist mode of production – for example, the tendency for the rate of profit to fall, or the co-ordination of economic activity by the state which undermines the philosophy of free markets – are understood to be conditioned by the distinctive character of the social formation. In this context, the term 'struggle' describes the continuous interactions which occur around the extraction of effort that derives from the capital-labour relation, interactions that become (temporarily) solidified in a 'frontier of control'. Embracing both informal and formal elements, 'control' refers to a system of regulation that is a product of the capital-labour relation. Both managers and workers are intimately involved. Together with changes in product markets and other external factors, the frontier of control is understood to be the outcome of previous struggles, and to shape their future expression.

To explore the reality of control as 'a system of regulation', Edwards distinguishes between 'detailed control' and 'general control'. Whereas detailed control refers to the immediate work process, and cannot be shared – what is a gain of control for one party is a loss by the other – general control describes the overall effectiveness of the productive system. The particular characteristics and development of these forms of control are said to be conditioned by struggles at the workplace and the context of the accumulation process. Struggles and contexts are understood to be interrelated, an argument that is illustrated in a comment on the state of British industrial relations during the 1960s. During this period, struggles at the point of production could not be adequately explained except by reference to weaknesses elsewhere in the economy – weaknesses which they helped to reproduce and exacerbate. On the one hand, capitalists 'lacked the power to rationalise the production process', while on the other, workers had a defensive strength based on traditional job

controls but lacked 'the organisation base to press for a different kind of economic regeneration'.

In agreement with Thompson (and Burawoy), Edwards draws upon this conceptual framework to defend the study of the point of production in the face of critics who have questioned its centrality and relevance for understanding changes in the organisation and control of the labour process (e.g. Kelly, 1985). Without denying that the appropriation of surplus value is but one moment in the circuit of capital, he suggests that:

the concern to avoid over-concentration on the labour process moves labour-process analysis too far in the opposite direction, with pressures in the marketplace being stressed and the capital-labour relation itself being seen as no more than 'the stage on which these external influences are worked out'.

For, at the point of production, each individual action may none the less have a logic: the logic of managing conflicting pressures, governed by the need to sustain the generation of surplus value. That managerial strategies are found to be piecemeal and seemingly inconsistent is only to be expected, as managers are continuously engaged in an effort to balance forces which are inescapably in a state of tension. By attending to the actions of managers and workers as the medium and outcome of the contradictory structure of the capital-labour relation, Edwards seeks to expose the one-dimensional basis of the attacks upon Braverman. Far from providing evidence of the inadequacy of his central thesis on 'deskilling' and 'control', their revelation of consent, tacit skills and the enrichment of jobs is understood to confirm the existence and/or the significance of structured antagonism at the heart of the capitalist mode of production.

Mark Wardell is also concerned to defend what he regards as the central thrust of Braverman's position against overzealous critics. However, in contrast to Edwards, he argues that most commentaries upon *Labor and Monopoly Capital* have either failed to recognise, or chosen to disregard, Braverman's own deep appreciation of the dialectical relationship between action and structure. For despite a

concentration upon 'the "objective" content of class', which Wardell stresses is both explicit and self-imposed, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is found to betray this limitation in at least three ways. First, Wardell stresses that social relations produce the means of production and that the latter's course of development only *appears* to be natural and inevitable. Second, he emphasises the intelligent, purposive and infinitely adaptable qualities of human labour. Third, he recognises that the realisation of human productive power is limited in part by the subjective condition of the workers.

In arguing for this interpretation of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Wardell makes direct reference to Braverman's thesis that the impact of the scientific-technical revolution is to make management 'the sole subjective element' as the worker is removed to 'a place among its inanimate objective factors'. However, whereas most commentators have focused on the deterministic and objectivistic thrust of this thesis, Wardell underlines the qualification that this is 'an ideal towards which management tends and is realised only within definite limits'. In reality, Braverman stresses how new structures of control are resisted; new skills emerge that frustrate the ideal and create new arenas of struggle; and administrative workers – clerks, managers, accountants, engineers – find themselves in relations of antagonism comparable to those contained in the process of production.

From these observations, Wardell concludes that Braverman's study incorporates two levels of analysis: an appreciation of the potential of human labour that underpins the dependence of capital and 'negates capitalists' interests at the point of production'; and a theory which interprets the historical transformation of production as an outcome of the capacity of labour power to negate and be negated by the efforts of capitalists to convert use value into surplus value. These two levels, it is argued, are combined in *Labor and Monopoly Capital* to reveal 'the dialectical process transforming the workplace'. In this light, many of Braverman's critics are found to be blind to Braverman's appreciation of the labour process as 'a form of praxis involving a subject-object dialectic', and therefore exaggerate grossly the strains of determinism and functionalism within his work.

Reflecting upon these observations, Wardell suggests that the inheritors of Braverman's legacy divide into two camps. In one camp are the structuralists who, in adopting 'a control-resistance paradigm', study the capitalist labour process 'as if it were arranged in accordance with a structurally endowed capacity to control production'. In the other camp are the dialecticians who, in Wardell's view,

comply more closely with the spirit (if not the letter) of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. The structuralists are commended for addressing directly the collective action of the working class in relation to changes in control mechanisms within the workplace, but they are criticised for treating labour power only as a finite capacity and not also as an infinite potential. This deficiency, Wardell argues, results in a one-dimensional account of the labour process in which the dynamic, ongoing historical transformation of the workplace is represented as the result of predictable confrontations between two structurally determined sets of interest-bearing actors. In contrast, Braverman is understood to have recognised how workers 'exercise their influence over production, daily reproducing the struggle at the points of production', an approach that has been carried forward by proponents of a dialectical analysis.

Above all, dialectical analysis is differentiated from structural analysis by the centrality it gives to the praxis of human labour (see Willmott, in this volume). Through praxis, human beings objectify their own purposes within limits set by the social relations of production – relations which are at once a medium and an outcome of their productive activity. Despite a trend towards the dissociation of conception and execution highlighted by Braverman, it is argued that Braverman's attentiveness to praxis reveals that subjectivity is never totally suppressed or surrendered and that the scientific-technical revolution tends to extend struggle into new arenas. In contrast to a structuralist approach which tends to portray workers as impotent, hopelessly fragmented ciphers who must await 'pressure from the substructure of society to force them through a structural crack and on to the stage of history', a dialectical approach is said to be attentive to 'the domains, potential and amount of influence workers collectively have over the creation of value' and reveals in stark relief the impossibility of reconciling through technocratic means the contradictory pressures that are endemic to the capitalist mode of production. In this respect, Wardell's position is informed by an orientation that has more in common with Thompson's concern to develop a theory with an emancipatory intent than with Edwards's concern to advance a dialectical theory of conflict.

Andrew Friedman's is the first of three chapters focusing more directly upon specific aspects of the labour process. Drawing upon his

earlier conceptualisation of managerial strategies, he seeks to develop a more complex theory of the organisation and control of the labour process. In so doing, he argues for the retention of the analytical distinction between managerial strategies which depend upon the 'responsible autonomy' of labour and those which rely upon 'direct control', but he also seeks to apply this framework in the analysis of categories of activities which exist within all labour processes. In common with Thompson (in this volume), Friedman's analysis is based upon the understanding that wage labour is a peculiar kind of commodity. Specifically, Friedman stresses its malleability and its independence or wilfulness. Depending upon changes in market conditions and patterns of worker resistance, these two characteristics of wage labour are seen to prompt two types of managerial strategy. Either managers are inclined towards a strategy that trades upon the malleability of labour, in which case they maintain their authority by encouraging the responsible exercise of discretion, or the strategy towards labour is informed by a concern to limit the scope of workers' wilfulness, in which case authority is secured through direct control over the actions of labour. Both types of strategy, it is argued, encounter contradictions. On the one hand, the strategy of 'Responsible Autonomy' denies that workers are structurally alienated from their labour; on the other, the strategy of 'Direct Control' assumes that workers can be forced to surrender control over what they do for most of their waking hours.

Given the structure of property rights in capitalist societies, managers are identified as normally taking the primary initiatives in the organisation of productive activity. In so doing their actions are conditioned, but not determined, by the prevailing mix of 'Responsible Autonomy' and 'Direct Control' within their strategies as well as by their interpretation of the significance of 'environmental factors'. Responding to those who have suggested that such factors (for example, changes in markets and technology) are more significant than strategies towards labour in understanding the organisation of work, Friedman acknowledges that shifts in the balance of strategic elements are associated with changes in these factors. He also notes the importance of avoiding a confusion of labour-control strategies with the ultimate aims of managers. He stresses, none the less, that managerial strategies towards environmental factors such as markets and technology are themselves 'constrained by labour policies'. Finally, he emphasises that his conception of managerial strategies towards labour allows for 'management error': strategies 'are about

intentions which need not be coherent, conscious, constant or successful'.

More specifically, Friedman's analysis identifies the strategic dimensions of 'task organisation', the 'control structure', 'labour-market relations', and 'lateral relations' amongst workers. Through an exploration of these dimensions, he seeks to examine the complexities and dynamics of management strategy. For example, he observes that the organisation of tasks in the direction of either Direct Control or Responsible Autonomy may be subjected to 'strategic dilution' when the demands of workflows or technology conflict with the basic strategy. Friedman concludes that the positioning of activities on the continuum between Direct Control and Responsible Autonomy will tend to move 'in predictable directions' in response to changing market conditions, changing technical opportunities and the changing balance of class struggle.

Dominic Strinati criticises Braverman for providing a cursory and unimaginative discussion of the state in which it is conceived as a monolith that stands outside and apart from industrial relations. The deficiencies in Braverman's conception of the role of the state, in which it is theorised primarily as the guarantor of the relations of production and thus of the interests of the capitalist class, are said to reflect the orthodox Marxist assumption that only capital, and not the state, can structure the organisation of class exploitation and control. Strinati is no less critical of those (for example, Littler and Salaman, 1982) who have sought to improve upon this formulation by revealing how the state exerts an influence over the structure of control. For despite the attention given to the use of incomes policies and the like, they continue to view the state as an external force that intervenes in the organisation of the labour process. As a consequence, they do not explore in any detailed way the changing forms of the relationship between the labour process and the state. Finally, Burawoy's (1979; 1985) efforts to develop a more adequate theory of the labour process, incorporating a consideration of the intertwining of its political, ideological and economic dimensions, is found to offer disappointingly little insight into the particulars and the dynamics of the state-labour process relation.

To improve upon existing formulations of the relationship between industrial relations and the state, Strinati turns to the literature on

corporatism and populism. Reviewing the role of different sets of employers and managers in influencing the form of state regulation of the structures of industrial relations in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, he argues that corporatism involves and strengthens the political organisation of economic interests and implicitly challenges the separation of economy and state in capitalist societies. In contrast, populism undermines and disenfranchises these interests as it makes its appeal directly to a (disorganised) mass of workers. Challenging the legitimacy of vested interests, it champions the lot of those whose individual rights and freedoms are said to be infringed by the presence of corporatist associations. Acknowledging that there are important differences between the strategic intentions and ideological pretensions of corporatist and populist politics and their practical consequences both within the workplace and beyond, Strinati focuses on the former without entirely neglecting the significance of the latter.

In the context of the recent history of industrial relations in Britain, corporatism is theorised as a defensive and impotent response to crisis. This crisis occurred because a well-organised working-class movement succeeded in disrupting managerial control. Given the conditions of a mature social democracy and relative affluence, where accumulation was stagnating and the state was failing to stimulate economic growth, corporatism was favoured as a strategy for co-opting organised interests into the process of economic management. In exchange for a position of uncertain influence in managing the economy, organised labour was co-opted to fulfil its obligations to the state by controlling its membership. In this process, the source of its power shifted from the unpredictable organisation of the grass-roots membership to the legal protections afforded by the state. The chief limitation of this corporatist strategy, Strinati observes, was that, unlike the forces of the 'free market', corporatism had no determinable effect upon the accumulation process. Moreover, it had little legitimacy in terms of the separation of economy and state. For a variety of reasons, political alliances made in the formation of corporatist arrangements were never sufficiently strong or stable to sustain their development. Crucially, the corporatist strategy lacked sufficient support both from powerful sections of the working class and from powerful 'fractions of capital'. Flagging before the election of a Conservative government in 1979, these arrangements were swept aside in favour of a populist strategy in which control has been regained in the name of 'the people'.

In contrast to corporatism, populism is associated with material conditions, such as high unemployment and recession, which weaken the economic bargaining power of organised interests. The populist strategy pursued by the Conservative administration since 1979, Strinati argues, has taken the form of a series of Acts of Parliament designed to reform (that is, weaken the powers of) organised interests which were deemed to have ridden roughshod over the legitimate rights of individual union members and to have impeded the efficient and legitimate allocation and regulation of labour. Whereas the corporatist strategy of controlling labour had enjoyed only grudging, pragmatic support from the fractions of capital, the populist concern to replace the 'bully boys' with the ballot box and return the unions to their members received much more enthusiastic support. Specifically, it promised to withdraw from unions the privileges (for example, the closed shop, secondary action, immunities in law) that they were perceived to have so wilfully abused during the period of the previous Labour administration. However, whilst the ideological and political successes of Tory populism are acknowledged (for example, challenging the legitimacy of organised interests and in weakening their power), Strinati observes that its reliance upon processes of fragmentation and individualisation as means of control is heavily dependent upon conjuring into existence a homogeneous 'people' when, in the real world, there is 'a series of unequal, divergent, and competing economic, political and cultural interests'. Like corporatism, the strategy of populism is seen to be risky since it courts the danger of being stood on its head as the power ascribed to 'the people' (or the organised interests in the corporatist strategy) can, with a change of material conditions, lead them to oppose policies pursued in their name. In the meantime, the trend of recent industrial-relations reforms (for example, the use of secret ballots) is seen 'to define union members as privatised individuals, divorced from organised representation at the workplace and from the solidarities which can serve to mitigate and alleviate the exploitation and grievances continually being generated by the labour process' (see Knights and Willmott, both in this volume). It is precisely the effect of such reforms upon the organising powers of labour, Strinati argues, that makes the connection between the state and the labour process worthy of more detailed examination.

Jackie West addresses the relationship between gender and class. Demonstrating the importance of gender to understanding the labour process, she explores the connection between class and gender in the capitalist mode of production. West argues that an integrationist position, where the construction of gender differences are seen to take place within production itself and not just elsewhere (for example, patriarchal legacy, reproduction), represents an improvement upon a dual-systems approach, in which the presence of patriarchy is used to explain the allocation of persons to jobs but not the structure of inequality. However, although patriarchy provides a valuable explanation of the allocation of jobs, its contribution to understanding structured inequality has been the subject of a highly controversial debate. Informed by this debate, West's analysis concentrates on the contemporary situation by paying special attention to three major issues: gender and skill, gendered work, and the impacts of recent restructuring of capitalism and class relations on gender at work.

When examining each of these issues, West seeks to correct one-sided patriarchal analyses by incorporating an appreciation of the class nature of gendered work. So, for example, whilst recognising that the social construction of skill is gendered and that women occupy positions inferior to those of men as a consequence, she points to the different demands of capital, and not just to the effects of patriarchal practices, in structuring the sexual division of labour. Similarly, when examining the gendered work, and especially the research of Cockburn (1984), West is critical of the tendency for 'gender identity to obliterate class position'. Turning to the contemporary restructuring of capitalism, her focus is upon the rapid increase in the employment of women, especially in the service sector, which West relates to the demand for labour flexibility and the reassertion of capital's power over labour. Indeed, many recent employment trends – part-time, temporary, self-employed, contract labour – are seen to have a significance for the gendered division of labour. Arguing that such changes cannot simply be explained in terms of the power of men over women but must be examined also in terms of the politics of class and the politico-economic conditions of capitalist development, West concludes that gender at work cannot be studied independently of an analysis of the strategies of capital.

Gibson Burrell's is the first of the concluding group of chapters which draw upon ideas that have been largely absent from the labour process literature. Burrell is less concerned with the strengths and weakness of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* and its successors than with the questions of why Braverman's project has been so influential in Britain and why it has also come under such fierce attack. To answer these questions, Burrell employs the work of the French theorist Jean-Francois Lyotard to draw a distinction between Modernist, pre-Modernist and post-Modernist forms of life. Whereas Modernism is characterised by the search for a totalising framework in which everything can be explained, pre-Modernism is parochial in the sense that it privileges the particular and the contingent over the universal. Post-Modernism reflects a disillusionment with Modernism that follows from the realisation that there is a plurality of life-worlds and language games, and that the Modernist desire to totalise by privileging its own sense of rationality places an irrational constraint upon human possibility.

Burrell begins by suggesting that the exceptional influence of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* can be explained by reference to an identity crisis in (British) sociology which preceded its appearance. This crisis had been occasioned by the publication, in the late 1960s, of the Affluent Worker studies. It is argued that these had placed in question 'the distinctive competence' of industrial sociology by arguing that the worker's orientations are formed outside its sphere of action. *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was seized upon because it legitimated the point of production as a coherent intellectual focus of study, and thereby spared industrial sociologists from the unwelcome exploration of other poorly regarded specialisms such as family and community. For comparable but different reasons, the fields of industrial relations and organisation theory were also receptive to central themes within Braverman's work. In providing a 'meta-narrative' which embraced and connected a number of previously disparate phenomena, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is seen to provide both a meeting point and a target for students of work. Most critiques of Braverman's thesis, Burrell argues, have been dependent upon a philosophy of empiricism which appeals to 'facts' that serve to falsify his generalisations. In this empiricist context, the most unimaginative case-study research achieves spurious significance by its apparent capacity to discredit some aspect of Braverman's meta-narrative. This reliance upon the brute facts of empirical research, Burrell argues, is characteristic of a pre-Modernist approach in which

fragmentation precedes the effort to unify and rationalise the social world.

The way forward, Burrell suggests, lies in developing an approach that is sensitive to the presence and processes of fragmentation in the capitalist world-system whilst rejecting the post-Modernist refusal to entertain totalising projects. To this end, the commentaries of Modernist authors (e.g. Lukács and Habermas) are reviewed in the light of a post-Modernist appreciation of the significance of fragmented labour. It is argued that two concepts – totality and labour – must continue to play a central part in the analysis. Using the concept ‘totality’, Burrell seeks to grasp the interdependence of fragmented social phenomena without assuming that they are, or ever could be, unified. By ‘labour’, Burrell means the ontological category of the totality – that is, the abstract characteristics (for example, effort) involved in the valorisation and realisation of surplus value, a process that is subject to ‘antagonistic contradictions of differing severity which produce perceptible fragmentations within “labour”’, and thereby structure the totality. Deploying the totality–labour nexus in this way, Burrell argues that it is possible to integrate a large and diverse body of literature that has a common theme of ‘fragmented labours’ so as to provide the foundations of a meta-narrative capable of replacing the classic, but now outmoded, texts of Goldthorpe and Braverman.

David Knights draws upon the work of Foucault to respond to critiques of Braverman’s separation of the objective and subjective contents of class. Knights argues that there has been an unhelpful tendency to retain Braverman’s distinction between subjective action which is freely chosen and objective behaviour which is determined or controlled. His concern is to develop a theory of the subject which overcomes both ‘the fundamental dualism between agency and structure’ and the limitations of mechanical attempts to relate them. Often taking the form of a control–resistance paradigm (see Wardell, in this volume), Knights argues that Braverman’s critics themselves routinely reproduce rather than correct the ‘suspect philosophical dualism between freedom and determinism’. Similarly, those who stress how the ‘dual character’ of the capital–labour relation can create a space for co-operation and consent within this relationship are seen to slide into a one-dimensional voluntarism in which

subjectivity is seen to be synonymous with autonomy, creativity and personal control. In each case, the (free) subjectivity of the self is assumed to exist independently of its conditioning by the so-called objective structures; and thus to represent some residual autonomy that the forces of capitalism are forever seeking unsuccessfully to claim as their own.

To illuminate this thesis, Knights examines two ethnographies which have focused some attention on the subject in the labour process – Burawoy's and Cockburn's. Burawoy is seen to subscribe to an essentialist conception of human nature in which self-expression is understood to be a fundamental condition of human existence. This, Knights argues, leads him to explain workers' enthusiastic participation in the game of 'making-out' in terms of their seeking compensation for the deprivation of opportunities for self-expression within the capitalist labour process. What Burawoy misses, Knights suggests, is the extent to which success in the game is not so much a compensation as an integral part of the worker's masculine or macho identity of independence and control – an identity that is constituted through, but contributes to the reproduction of, an exclusively male and physically tough manual labour process in the machine shop at Allied. Turning to Cockburn's study, this is seen to concentrate upon the very conditions and consequences of gender identity and relations in the labour process which Burawoy neglects. It is claimed, however, that she fails to recognise the sense in which modern power regimes constitute subjectivity in terms of individual responsibility, autonomy and independence such that its contradiction, though potentially a threat to dignity, is routinely denied in both discursive and non-discursive practices. Macho sexism, it is suggested, is just one of many strategies through which to impose a reality of assertive independence as a means of sustaining a sense of identity in modern society. It is concluded that a more developed theory of subjectivity is required in order to advance a more penetrating understanding of these accounts of the labour process.

The proposed alternative draws upon Foucault's genealogical approach to subjectivity in which any notion of an autonomous 'transcendental subject' is removed. In so far as subjects perceive themselves to act autonomously, it is because they have been constituted by 'specific technologies that individualise, normalise and discipline human bodies'. They exert this effect by virtue of the freedom that is part of the human condition. For Foucault, freedom and power are internally necessary to one another. It is this, Knights

argues, which allows his analysis to escape determinism, on the one hand, and voluntarism, on the other. However, Knights is also critical of Foucault's exploration of the propensity of human beings to resist their subjugation within power-knowledge relations and, more fundamentally, of his limited explanation of why human beings are so vulnerable to this subjugation in the first place. One approach, consistent with Foucault's analysis, would be to argue that this vulnerability results from prior exposure to technologies of power that constitute subjects in ways that dispose them to participate in these mechanisms. Without denying that this process occurs, Knights suggests that a less tautologous explanation can be found in the anxieties and insecurities which attend the social process of subjectivisation and subjugation. From this perspective, engagement in technologies of power is understood to be motivated by the desire to achieve an orderly existence – a desire that is continuously frustrated and fuelled by the precarious and unpredictable construction and reproduction of self. In this light, the propensity to resist technologies of power is seen to depend upon the extent to which these technologies serve to confirm or threaten prevailing subjectivities as well as upon the capacity of these individualised subjects to mobilise collectively.

In conclusion, it is argued that labour process theory could benefit from utilising Foucault's analysis of power and subjectivity, since it revitalises traditional conceptions of management control and labour exploitation. But, Knights argues, it is necessary to go beyond Foucault to understand the existential tensions and insecurities which are a consequence of individualisation and which make subjects ever more vulnerable to the subjugating effects of modern power regimes. In short, if labour process theory is to advance political praxis so as to escape its present impotence, Knights concludes that it will require as much awareness of subjects' preoccupation with securing stable meanings as an understanding of the mechanisms of discipline, techniques of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies.

Hugh Willmott is also concerned to remedy the deficient appreciation of subjectivity within labour process theory. This he seeks to do through a retrieval and critique of Marx's contribution to the dialectics of praxis. Sharing the view of Burawoy that greater attention must be given to the political and ideological aspects of the

capital–labour relation, Willmott argues that this insight must be deepened by appreciating how the existentially problematic character of self-consciousness is accentuated within the capitalist mode of production. Criticising labour process theory for its neglect of the significance of our separation from nature, he argues that subjectivity is shaped not only by our historical positioning within relations of power, including the capital–labour relation but also by the existential experience of our open relationship to the world – a relationship which yields the negativity of anxiety and insecurity as well as the positive potential to be productive. A more adequate theory of the capitalist labour process, Willmott argues, must take account of the interpenetration of the historical and existential dimensions of social reproduction.

Beginning with a review of the allegedly dialectical alternative to Bravermanian analysis, Willmott concludes that much of its appeal amounts to little more than a re-packaging of ideas which are to be found, albeit in skeletal form, within Braverman's work. Most critically, he highlights the marginalisation of the concept of praxis and an associated reluctance to theorise subjectivity as anything other than a disembodied bearer of structures or an expression of an essentialist conception of human nature. To appreciate and correct these lacunae more effectively within labour process analysis, Willmott reviews the development of Marx's understanding of subjectivity as labour. Accordingly, the central sections of the chapter are taken up with a review and critique of Marx's understanding of subjectivity. This is then followed by a re-examination of the work of influential post-Braverman texts in the light of the critique.

Marx's thinking on subjectivity and the dialectics of praxis is traced from his early writings on alienation to the mature formulation of historical materialism, where the self-consciousness of individuals is found to be all but disregarded. While concerned not to repeat the errors of bourgeois humanism, Willmott returns to re-examine Marx's early reflections upon the relationship between human beings and nature. In particular, he is critical of Marx's exclusive identification of the undesirable, 'dehumanising' expressions of human being with the existence of private property. Without denying the importance of this association, he seeks to highlight the significance of the anxieties and insecurities arising from the experience of separation from nature in reproducing asymmetrical relations of power. While our open relationship to nature permits the imagining of alternative realities in advance of constructing them (or resisting what exists), it

is also seen to prompt the desire, which is exploited and compounded by the individualising demands of capitalism, to secure ourselves in existing identities and thereby inadvertently to collude in the reproduction of conditions of exploitation and oppression.

Willmott then illustrates his thesis by reference to the work of four influential analyses – Friedman, Cressey and MacInnes, Burawoy and Pollert – who have each emphasised the importance of the subjectivity and/or dialectics for labour process theory. He concludes that attention to the consequences of wo/man's contradictory relation to nature does not deny the significance of capitalist relations of production in the constitution of the modern subject. However, to restrict analysis to the historical, capital–labour relation is to favour a disembodied theory of subjectivity in which the dialectics of praxis between nature and society are distorted or denied. Only by theorising the labour process as a medium and outcome of both existential (wo/man–nature) and historical (wo/man–society) dimensions of the dialectics of praxis, it is argued, can we understand and change the dissipation of human energy in securing identity instead of striving to transform the structure of social relations which stimulates and supplies such desires.

To conclude: labour process analysis provides a distinctive and penetrating account of how work is organised in capitalist societies. For this reason, the labour process perspective is likely to make a continuing contribution to the body of knowledge concerned with economy and society. The chapters in this volume reflect and make more transparent the existence of a diversity of intertwined perspectives within labour process theory on capitalist labour processes. Three such perspectives may be identified. One takes the view that the world is too complex to be captured adequately by any one theory. This approach demands the continuous examination of labour process analyses, amongst other approaches, to determine how their (partial) correspondence with aspects of the real world of work may qualify them to make a contribution to this project. A second assumes that there is one fundamental key to understanding the nature and dynamics of social reality. In the context of labour process theory, this has taken one of two forms. Either the labour process is theorised as a medium and outcome of an exploitative and contradictory capital–labour relation – in which case evidence of

consent as well as expressions of rebellion are viewed as an effect of this contradictory relation; or the labour process is theorised as the product of domination involving a dialectic of control and resistance that arises in the effort to secure a measure of autonomy. The nature of the relations between managers and workers is then attributed less to the exploitative structure of the capital–labour relation than to pressures exerted by impersonal (for example, market and bureaucratic) forces. Finally, a third perspective is informed by the belief that the value of any theory resides in its emancipatory potential. Again, in the context of the labour-process debate, this orientation takes two forms. One inclines to the view that the exploitative structure of the capital–labour relation is the only key to analysing oppression and the basis for emancipatory action; the other suggests that emancipation is dependent upon the complex ways in which we, as human beings, form our subjectivity and reproduce/change the labour process. Collectively, the contributors to this volume provide an assessment of the progress that has been made since the publication of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. They also suggest a number of avenues for developing a more adequate theorising of the capitalist labour process.

Notes

1. The reasons for this extended period of gestation are not well understood, although it is probably no coincidence that the ‘rediscovery’ of the labour process coincided with a particular conjuncture of material and ideological consensus and the emergence of a cohort of radical social scientists following a rapid expansion of higher education during the late sixties and early seventies. Whatever the reasons, Braverman’s work resonated loudly with the concerns of many social scientists who were disenchanted with the superficiality and unresponsiveness of industrial sociology to the historical development and restructuring of capitalism as a mode of production. See also Burrell, in this volume.
2. In making reference to ‘capital’ (and to ‘labour’), Marx underscores his thesis that the despotic capitalist system reduces human beings to mere functionaries, or bearers, of the imperative of valorisation. Thus, the capitalist is said to ‘function only as *personified* capital, capital as person, just as the worker is no more than *labour personified*’ (Marx, 1976: 989). Similarly, in the preface to the first edition of *Capital*, Marx stresses that ‘individuals are dealt with here only insofar as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class relations and interests’ (ibid.: 92).
3. Or, as Marx (1976: 275) puts it, the worker’s subsistence ‘contains an historical and moral element’.

4. Page numbers 948–1094 of *Capital*, vol. 1 refer to ‘Results of the Immediate Process of Production’. This chapter, which was originally intended as Part Seven of *Capital 1*, forms the appendix to the Penguin edition.
5. Elsewhere Marx uses notions of labour capacity and labour power interchangeably.
6. In his earlier writings, Marx recognises the economic conditions of alienation. In particular, he identifies private property as the condition and consequence of alienated labour (Marx, 1975: 331 ff.). But he had not developed what was principally a *moral* critique of dehumanised existence into a *systematic theory* of exploitation. In *Capital* his point of departure is the concrete – the material relations between capital and labour. This development (not break) in Marx’s thinking is most clearly articulated in ‘A Contribution to Political Economy’ (1859), where he summarises the principle that guides his future studies including *Capital*: ‘In the social production of their existence, men inevitably enter into definite relations, which are independent of their will, namely relations of production’ (Marx, 1975: 425). The centrality of the mediation between self, others and nature is affirmed in the notion of ‘the social production of existence’. Although Marx retains an expressivist conception of human nature, his critique of capitalism no longer relies solely upon an appeal to an ideal of humanity that is embedded yet estranged in the reproduction of existence. Instead, without discarding his moral belief in the contemporary alienation of the human essence, he advances a critique whose claim is to provide a scientific analysis of the forms of exploitation and contradiction that are integral to the structure and dynamic of the social (re)production of capitalist society. See Willmott, in this volume.
7. Compare Marx’s (1976) descriptions of the collective worker (esp. 468–9) with Taylor’s principles of scientific management. In *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman (1974: 146–51) illustrates this process by citing the example of the assembly methods stimulated by excessive demand for the Model T Ford. He reports that within three months the time needed to build a car had been reduced by 90 per cent, thereby providing Ford with the resources to buy off worker resistance to the new assembly-line methods.
8. Braverman does not specify in any precise way what he means by monopoly capitalism. However, he is clearly indebted to the analyses of Baran and Sweezy (1968) who associate it with the concentration and centralisation of capital imperialism and the internationalisation of trade. Fundamental to this analysis is an investigation of how and where capital generates and absorbs economic surpluses and the effect of such decisions upon the industrial structure of national economies.
9. Braverman observes that in the modern corporation management has become a form of wage labour – ‘a labor process conducted for the purpose of control within the corporation, and conducted moreover as a labor process exactly analogous to the process of production, although it produces no product other than the operation and cooperation of the corporation’ (Braverman, 1974: 267; see also 301, 416 ff.).

10. Braverman claims that it is 'impossible to overestimate the importance of the scientific management movement' and that 'its fundamental teachings have become the bedrock of all work design' (Braverman 1974: 86-7). However, although his emphasis is upon the incessant degradation of work, he does acknowledge that the ideal of real subordination is 'realised by capital only within definite limits' and that 'its very application brings into being new crafts and skills and technical specialities which are *first* the province of labour rather than management. Thus in industry all forms of labour coexist: the craft, the hand or machine detail worker, the automatic machine or flow process (ibid.: emphasis added). So, while recognising the coexistence of a diversity of forms of labour, he anticipates that skilled labour, including newly created skills, will in time become the exclusive preserve of management. However, as Elger (1982: 47) notes, his insight into the formation of skill does not lead him to examine how 'particular forms of organization of the collective labourer and the labour process arise out of specific exigencies of valorization'.
11. In particular, Braverman's exemplary appreciation of the importance of marketing has not been furthered within labour-process analysis, despite the fact that he devotes considerable space to it, making the provocative claim that 'within the manufacturing organization, marketing considerations become so dominant that the structure of the engineering division is itself permeated by and often subordinated to it. The planning of product obsolescence, both through styling and the impermanence of construction, is a marketing demand exercised through the engineering division, as is the *product cycle*: the attempt to gear consumer needs to the needs of production instead of the other way around' (Braverman 1974: 266). Similarly, Braverman's (ibid.: 302ff.) remarks on the expansion of management accounting and financial reporting have been largely unheeded (Johnson, 1980; Hooper, Storey and Willmott, 1987; Knights and Collinson, 1987).
12. Braverman's defence of this position is instructive. Instead of considering the detrimental effects of his omission of the subjective for analysing the reproduction of the '“objective” content of class', he attacks the work of bourgeois social scientists (e.g. human-relations writers) who believe that class has no existence beyond its subjective manifestation – a belief expressed in their view that 'the only thing worth studying is not work itself but the reaction of the worker to it' (Braverman, 1974: 29). While he offers no explanation of what he means by 'work itself' – a phrase which implies that work can exist independently of the worker – some clarification can be derived from his usage in a later discussion of the impacts of 'the scientific-technical revolution' upon the worker (ch. 8). There, following Marx's anticipation of a tendential movement towards the real subsumption of labour, labour is said to take 'a place among its inanimate objective factors' as management becomes 'the sole subjective element' (ibid.: 171). In this formulation, it would seem that notion of the objective content of class is intended to identify (inanimate) qualities, such as the stock of available jobs and predetermined content of tasks, that are independent of

- workers' volition – an interpretation that is supported by his own characterisation of *Labour and Monopoly Capital* as an effort to satisfy the need for 'a picture of the working class as it exists, as the shape given to the working population by the capital accumulation process' (ibid.: 27).
13. This review is clearly selective: it excludes consideration of a number of issues including Braverman's essentialist theory of human nature; the sexual and gendered divisions of labour: the importance of extra-workplace labour and relations; the significance of (new) technology; the international division of labour, etc. See, in particular, Knights, Littler, Strinati and West, all in this volume.
 14. Despite his understanding that 'classes are not fixed entities but rather *ongoing processes*' (1974: 409), Braverman favours an abstract economic conception of class in which class interests are objectively given. Similarly, although he points to significant differences within the ranks of the 'middle layers' (ibid.: 267), he categorises their class membership exclusively in terms of the directness of their contribution to the capital-accumulation process (ibid.: 407).
 15. Burawoy (1985) develops the concept of 'factory regime' (ibid.: 10 ff.) to analyse variations in the relationship between political apparatuses of production within the factory and state politics and state apparatuses (ibid.: 122 ff.). Four ideal-typical forms of regime are identified: market despotic, hegemonic, bureaucratic despotic and collective self-management. Variations in particular types of regime are also identified. Thus, when examining the labour process in nineteenth-century cotton mills, he compares 'the company state' with patriarchal and paternalistic forms of despotism (Burawoy, 1985, ch. 2). Of the four major types of regime only the first two are relevant for the analysis of the labour process in capitalist society. The other two are relevant for the examination of factory work in state socialist and workers' socialist societies, respectively.
 16. Universal suffrage is cited as an illustration of a concession won from capital that has simultaneously improved the material position of labour and become 'a fetter on proletarian consciousness' (Burawoy, 1985: 28). Also, in the market, the zero-sum nature of exchange relations between capital and labour is recognised to be displaced and mystified by the non-zero-sum nature of the use values generated within this relationship. For example, productivity improvements can support rises in wages even (and indeed especially) as the rate of extraction of surplus values increases.
 17. Burawoy (1985: 37) contends that there are few workplaces 'in which labourers do not construct "games", with respect to technology and to one another. Even on the assembly line workers manage to secure spaces for themselves in which to introduce uncertainty and to exercise a minimal control. These games are modes of adaptation, a source of relief from the irksomeness of capitalist work.' See Knights, in this volume.
 18. In Burawoy's view, the central principle of securing and obscuring the extraction of surplus value sets limits upon the separation of conception from execution. On the one hand, the surplus is made transparent if

there is too little separation; on the other, the securing of surplus is threatened if the separation is too great. In this light, techniques of work humanisation, i.e. job enrichment, enlargement, etc.) are said to 'signify the upper limits' on this separation (Burawoy, 1985: 50).

19. At the same time, Burawoy is not blinded to the vulnerability of co-operation within hegemonic regimes when challenged by threats, taking the form of plant closures, labour shedding, the casualisation of employment, the repeal and/or non-enforcement of labour legislation and the intensification of work through a variety of 'quality of working life' and 'quality circle' programmes, the restructuring of national and international mobility of capital and the internationalisation of the division of labour. In such cases, the weakness of union organisation is also exposed by an unpreparedness and/or powerlessness to resist such threats. Characteristic of this new regime of 'hegemonic despotism', Burawoy contends, is the pressure upon labour to compete with labour in other locations by offering ever more generous concessions (e.g. no-strike agreements, flexibility, casualisation) in order to attract or retain the jobs supplied by capital. However, Burawoy also anticipates that these concessions may provoke a greater awareness of the international nature of capitalism and 'a broader recognition that the material interests of the working class can be vouchsafed only beyond capitalism, beyond the anarchy of the market and beyond despotism in production' (Burawoy, 1985: 152).

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2 The Labour Process Debate: A Theoretical Review 1974–88

Craig R. Littler

THE LABOUR PROCESS DEBATE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was published in 1974. It stimulated a widespread debate in Britain, which gathered pace through the latter part of the 1970s. This debate has extended and diversified, so that now there are three major overlapping currents:

- (1) Questions about *deskilling* and the attempt to construct a satisfactory model of skill changes.
- (2) Questions about *labour markets* and the attempt to construct a satisfactory model of capitalist labour markets.
- (3) Questions about *managerial strategy and control*.

This leaves out of account various other strands of the debate; nevertheless the three areas above seem to me to be the core areas and to help to define the parameters of the debate. In this chapter I intend to focus on the third area: questions about managerial strategy and control; this is the area of research which has shown the most theoretical development in the past few years and which has generated heated controversy (e.g. Storey, 1985; Friedman, 1987).

Before focusing on managerial strategy and control, however, it is worth considering why Braverman's work had such a large impact in the United Kingdom. Empirical sociological research on work in Britain dates from the late 1940s. The predominant problematic within that research related to productivity, so much so that it was largely a sociology of productivity. During a period when Britain's

relative export performance and balance of payments were central issues of public policy, what was seen as problematic about work was low productivity, low morale, resistance to new technology and employer/worker conflicts. Given this agenda, the areas of research were also restricted. The predominant emphasis in such research from the 1940s until the 1960s was on the study of male manual workers in the traditional industries of engineering, shipbuilding, steel, mining, and so on (Brown, 1984). Relatedly, until the 1960s the classical sociologists were not pertinent to the development and concerns of industrial sociology. Instead, industrial sociology consisted basically of empirical investigations loosely organised around a few general concepts (Baldamus, 1961: 5). These general concepts tended to be workplace-based, without an adequate conceptualisation of the wider economy or the wider society. Environmental factors, if referred to at all, were utilised rather arbitrarily as in, for example, the concept of 'work orientations'. Goldthorpe *et al.* (1969) introduced the notion of work orientations in an effort to explain employees' workplace responses by reference to their experience outside the plant. However, this concentration on perceptions and subjective orientations tended to ignore structural factors, such as the nature of labour markets. At worst, such discussions tended to trivialise theoretical analysis by dealing with perceptions as if they were unrelated to practice (see Baldamus, 1976: 71).

Beyond the intrinsic weaknesses of traditional British industrial sociology lay the fact that the academic study of work and work relations had been distributed among managerial studies, organisations theory, industrial relations and the sociology of occupations as well as industrial sociology. Braverman's major contribution, as I have said elsewhere, was to smash through the academic barriers and offer the potential for the birth of a new, integrated approach to the study and history of work (Littler, 1982: 25–6) which provided an (apparently) coherent theoretical framework and also directed attention to a range of issues and problem areas both within and beyond the workplace, which had previously been seen as unrelated. Braverman attempted to reintegrate a consideration of the division of labour, technology and management methods with an analysis of occupational structure, class structure and the phases of capitalism. Moreover, the analysis was placed in a context of an appealing and easy-to-understand theory of work history; a context which had been absent from the work of such writers as Fox, Goldthorpe or Woodward. This, then, was the appeal of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* to British industrial sociologists.

THE LABOUR PROCESS PARADIGM

Labour process theory examines the question of the ultimate function of management and asserts that this function is the conversion of labour power (the potential for work) into labour (actual work effort) under conditions which permit capital accumulation (Braverman, 1974: ch. 1). Such a function can be said to exist in all organisations that employ labour and to the extent that individual or collective worker resistance interferes with it, management will be concerned to 'control' labour. The context of management and managerial control varies with different phases of capitalism. Braverman focuses on monopoly capitalism, which he takes as a central concept and attempts to link to specific characteristics of the labour process in terms of the division of labour and modes of control. Thus Braverman assumes that the phase of monopoly capitalism entails extensive job fragmentation and job specialisation across industries and that a dynamic of deskilling is the primary impetus behind job design. Relatedly, according to Braverman's analysis, the logic of Taylorism is the logic of managerial control and Taylorite ideas are embedded within machine design, so that understanding technology involves understanding Taylorism. (For Braverman's view of Taylorism see Braverman 1974: chs 4, 5; for my analysis of Taylorism see Littler, 1982: ch. 5).

All the details of this paradigm have been questioned by myself and by many other writers (in the British literature see Friedman, 1977; Wood [ed.] 1982; Littler, 1982; Storey, 1983; Knights, Willmott and Collinson, 1985). However, I do not wish to pursue a detailed critique of Braverman and a simple labour process paradigm in this chapter. Instead, what of the central question – how is the concept of management control formulated in the writings of Braverman? Essentially Braverman posits a simple antithesis of craft control versus managerial control – or, perhaps more broadly, worker control versus capitalist control. Within this framework the development of management control must proceed by means of a direct deposition of worker influence over the means and nature of production: it

becomes essential for the capitalist that control over the labour process pass from the hands of the worker into his own. This transition presents itself in history as the progressive alienation of the process of production from the worker; to the capitalist, it presents itself as the problem of management. (Braverman, 1974: 58)

According to this account, then, the origins of modern management lie in employers' growing needs to control workers in ways unachievable through traditional forms of control over producers. The imposition of capitalist control takes the form of a substitution of management expertise for the worker's consciousness as the driving force or 'directing mechanism' of labour. Conception becomes separated from execution, so that what people do at work becomes subject to what Hales calls 'preconceptualisation' – that is, the process of work design whereby the conditions of operation, of health and safety, of intensity and worker isolation or interdependence are already determined before the workers enter the factory gates (Hales, 1980: 57–8). In many ways the separation of conception and execution provides the central theme of Braverman's history of work relations: this separation or usurpation of original worker control constitutes a 'degradation of work'. (For an excellent discussion of the notion of control in Braverman, see Campbell, 1983.)

In the form in which it appears in Braverman's study, the conception of management control is too narrow to provide a basis for explaining the diverse changes in labour processes. The antithesis of craft control versus capitalist control pushes Braverman towards an implicit view that there are only two fundamental forms of the capitalist labour process. Thus the conception is poorly equipped to account for the actual historical changes, with variations over time and between industries, and as a consequence Braverman's account continually stumbles in attempting to locate historically the transition from craft control as the predominant form of work organisation to modern forms of control. Faced with these problems, Braverman is obliged to supplement the notion of a perennial search for capitalist control over the labour process with other possible determinants, such as the increasing scale of production. These factors, however, are suggested in an *ad hoc* fashion, and in general Braverman fails to confront the fundamental questions of how to locate a postulated dynamic of a search for intensified control within a broader politico-economic framework.

The conception of managerial control is not the only fundamental issue in Braverman's work. Given his emphasis on providing a theory of work history and in updating Marx in this respect, there is another key question: is there a direct and clear link between phases of capitalism and phases of the labour process? On the basis of existing work, the answer is negative; all efforts to define and establish such a direct and unvarying link have so far failed. In general, the empirical and historical work of different industries and different economies

suggests an openness, rather than a unilinear development. For example, studies of white-collar work in West Germany show considerable differences in relation to the impact of computerisation and new technology as compared to developments in the UK or the USA. Crompton and Jones (1984) argue that their study of three large white-collar organisations in Britain tends to support a Braverman-type deskilling thesis. In contrast, the German studies have tended to show that employers have not used their market position to deskill and cheapen labour but, on the contrary, have tended to eliminate *low*-skilled positions and to upgrade the existing labour force (Lane, 1985: 319). Equally, my own work comparing the development of work organisation in Britain and Japan tends to suggest a pattern of Japanese work organisation in large firms which is very different in terms of job design, training and the structure of control (Littler, 1982). At a theoretical level these research outcomes have led to an emphasis on the concept of managerial strategy. If there is no iron law that determines the nature of the labour process, then perhaps it is possible to understand events and processes in terms of a range of managerial strategies. This theoretical shift is considered in the next section of this chapter.

MANAGEMENT AND MANAGERIAL STRATEGY

The concept of managerial strategy, whilst apparently commonsensical, has given rise to fierce debate within the literature (see Rose and Jones, 1985; Child, 1985; Storey, 1985; Friedman, 1987; Hyman, 1987). There have been a number of lines of questioning:

- (1) The assumptions of rationality and the limits of rationality;
- (2) The relation between strategy and outcomes;
- (3) The extent to which the labour process and labour management is the main point of reference for managerial strategy or how labour management relates to commercial strategy;
- (4) Levels of formulation and constraints;
- (5) Appropriate categories for conceptualising strategy.

I shall deal with each of these issues in turn.

Many organisational case studies, especially British ones, have discovered that management operates with a bounded rationality or with a fire-brigade mentality: that is to say, management is more

concerned with coping with day-by-day crises than with long-term, strategic planning. As Tomlinson points out, 'management strategy' is an oversimplified perspective and the overall subordination of practices one to another cannot be taken for granted. Instead, management strategy is a 'holding together, a perpetual re-coupling of diverse practices within the enterprise' (Tomlinson, 1982: 128). Nevertheless, the ideas of some authors that 'strategy' entails consciousness, rationality, permanency or fixity of purpose and a detailed plan of campaign broadly accepted across levels and segments of management represents an over-rationalised conception of strategy (see Rose and Jones, 1985). Choices have to be made within a set of constraints and if these choices fall within a certain pattern, we are entitled to talk about 'managerial strategy'. In other words, 'strategy' refers to the *modus operandi* of managing labour and is a useful method of modelling organisational processes irrespective of the coherence, or otherwise, of the managing director's consciousness. (This is not, however, to argue that the degree of coherence and consciousness by which managers perceive strategies can be assumed away; it still remains as an important variable between organisations and over time.)

It is worth pointing out that levels of management rationality may vary between societies. In a study of the management of batch-production situations, Barry Turner concluded that batch production is complex, involving substantial scheduling problems and great uncertainties. Work was not planned in advance but monitored by a shortages problem based on progress-chasers and foremen. However, it occurred to him that he might not have arrived at a general analytic model but at a specific description of inadequate British management (Turner, 1970; see especially 97). Some weight is lent to the view of cultural relativity by the recent British Institute of Management survey of manufacturing operations in the UK, 1975-85 (reviewed by Nichols, 1987). It showed that few managements had identified a clear corporate strategy, set up careful monitoring procedures and carried them down to operating levels. For example, in 1985 half of the manufacturing plants did not bother to monitor their actual delivery performance. However, this evidence of lack of coherent management does not imply that there was a lack of consistent management choices. The same study also found that managers ranked the ability to produce at a low cost higher than the ability to produce high-performance products, whereas this ranking is reversed in the United States and in many European countries. This

pattern of choice has been consistent across nearly one hundred years of management action in manufacturing in the UK: Britain has long been a low-wage economy (Littler, 1982: 177).

Patterns of choice exist, then, though the strategic dimension may vary. We cannot collapse 'strategy' and outcomes. The question of the gap between intended strategy and realised outcome is relatively straightforward. To follow a strategy does not imply success. Equally clearly, a researcher cannot infer the successful implementation of a managerial strategy from a simple statement of policy (a point frequently forgotten in interpreting corporate statements). Also, as Child points out (1985: 109), one cannot infer a strategic intention from a particular form of work organisation or job design: such conditions at the point of production may result from decisions by supervisors, or informal work-group practices, or the outcomes of a struggle between workers and management. Intended strategy is transformed into emergent practices (realised strategy) only with 'leakages' at all levels of the organisation (Mintzberg, 1978), though presumably there must be some limits to the deviation of practice from policy. In general, we can hypothesise that all control systems decay; that is to say: all such systems are, over time, subject to reduced efficacy in eliciting worker effort and commitment because of the contradictory aspects of the labour process. This process of degeneration of control structures is clearly associated with control loss and further results in a gap between policy and practice.

One other area of contradiction which may create further gaps between strategy and outcomes arises from the notion of intermanagerial competition. Thus Armstrong (1984: 116) argues that 'control strategies are based on generalisations of the techniques and knowledge possessed by professional groups in competition for the key positions within the global function of capital'. Given this type of interpretation, Taylorism should be seen as the articulation of an engineer's ideology. Thus emergent practices and ideologies challenge the position and power of other managerial groups. However, even this perspective does not permit an unadulterated voluntarism; structure and imperative still exist and the need for capital accumulation cannot be ignored by the latest managerial fad or fashion.

Thirdly, there is the question of the degree to which the labour process is the central focus of managerial strategies. Certainly for writers in the Chandler tradition, the discussion of strategy has been very much focused on product markets and intercapitalist competition, leaving on one side the linkages between labour problems,

labour relations and the development of modern management (Patrick, 1975: 191–2). For such theorists the development of modern corporations can be satisfactorily explained without considering labour issues at all. Even if the limitations of this perspective are granted, there are still serious problems with elevating labour control to become the central problem of capitalist management. An assumption of the centrality of control over the labour process was questioned in Littler and Salaman (1982). We argued that whilst the production process results in a flow of income to an industrial enterprise, this does not preclude alternative sources of income playing a major or even a predominant role: they may include currency speculation, cumulative acquisitions and asset stripping, commodity speculation and credit manipulations of various kinds. Thus ICI, Britain's largest manufacturer, was losing money in the early 1980s in all its divisions except one – the foreign exchange department. This proved more profitable than making and selling chemicals and the company's foreign exchange trading activity doubled or trebled between 1979 and 1981 (*Financial Times*, 21 April 1981). Similar developments have taken place in Japan in the past two or three years. The rapid rise of the yen has put pressure on Japanese manufacturing corporation profits. The result has been a dramatic switch from investment in increased capacity and technology to investment in the equity market, real estate and currency speculation. This *Zaiteku* – 'financial technology' – has resulted in massive profits for some Japanese manufacturing corporations such as Toyota, Nissan and Matsushita, and the conversion of operating losses into paper profits for other companies (for example, Sony and Sanyo). Nor is it just a question of financial activities versus production activities. As we have said:

Surplus value has to be produced but also *realized* in the market. What this implies is that the realization of surplus value (i.e. finding markets, selling in those markets and making a profit) may be more crucial than the production of surplus value for certain firms, certain industries or during certain periods. (Littler and Salaman, 1982: 257)

The first two critiques of the strategy concept sensitise the researcher to the avoidance of simplistic assumptions – managements are not always rational and fully aware of long-term consequences, nor do

they always succeed. As a result, conflicting principles of labour management may be woven into the structure of the organisation.

However, a consideration of the third line of criticism leads to more important implications. In particular, it implies that any history of capitalist work organisation cannot be based solely on an analysis of the labour process. The primacy of labour strategies for management will and does vary. Thus the relevant theoretic question is: under what circumstances would one expect labour strategies to dominate managerial initiatives? An adequate conceptual answer to this question has not yet been provided. I can make some suggestions about the relationship between labour management and broader commercial strategies. In general, labour issues tend to be very much downstream factors as far as corporate planning is concerned. So what factors tend to influence this situation? Some of these are indicated below.

Table 1 Factors Affecting the Centrality of Labour Management

<i>Factors Promoting Centrality</i>	<i>Factors Tending to Diminish Centrality</i>
(a) New technology	(a) Stable technology
(b) Lack of well-structured external labour markets	(b) Well-structured external labour markets
(c) Low unemployment	(c) High unemployment
(d) Changing nature of competition	(d) Cartels, monopolies, etc.
(e) High dispute level	(e) Low dispute level
(f) Facility of international comparison	(f) Organisational insulation

The factors delineated in Table 1 tend to affect the strategic balance of significance between the factors of production (though not the balance of power between labour and management in any unmediated fashion). For example, new technology creates more points of decision-making within production processes and destabilises rigid work procedures, so that more management attention has to be devoted to such things as job design, training, and so on.

Most of the rest of the factors are straightforward, with the exception, perhaps, of point (f). The relevance of this point is bought out by Marsden *et al.* (1985: 24). They argue that:

A final aspect of inefficient utilization of labour, as of other resources, is that efficiency is a relative and not an absolute

concept. It has economic significance mostly in relation to the performance of firms competing in the same markets. Thus one company's method of labour utilization only becomes disadvantageous when a competitor finds other methods which give rise to a cost or quality advantage. It is of the nature of such changes that neither the management nor the workers are immediately aware that their own established and tested methods have become relatively less efficient.

The pressure of economic competition can take time to work through the market, given product differentiation and market niches. However, multinational corporations can – and do – make labour productivity and quality comparisons as a matter of internal accounting, and this has speeded up pressures towards labour-management changes in several industries.

The fourth area of questioning, the levels of formulation and constraints, I have written about elsewhere, and for reasons of brevity I shall not attempt to deal with it in detail. The issues have been put most succinctly by Hyman:

How far is control of the labour process and of its envioning conditions to be understood as a process of continuously evolving management design; as the outcome of an established structure of social relations within production; or as the consequence of a complex of institutions and determinations at the societal level? How far, indeed, are these alternative rather than complementary explanations? (Hyman, 1987: 49)

Part of the point here is that the nature of wage labour and of the control relationship is not set by any management strategy, however conscious or sophisticated, but by action at the level of the state. Adequate understanding of the nature and implications of new trends and new configurations of labour management require analysis of the broad relations between corporate management and the state (Strinati, in this volume). This, above all, should be one of the lessons of the analysis of Japanese management (see Moore, 1983).

With varying degrees of sophistication concerning the problems of the notion of managerial strategy, a number of labour process writers have developed various typologies of employer strategy (issue [5]). Braverman, as was underlined earlier, postulated a linear process of deskilling and intensifying control. Consequently, he had no concept

of 'managerial strategy'. R. Edwards (1979) also largely assumes a linear process. He identifies three historically successive forms of control: simple, direct control; technical control and bureaucratic control (see below). As we have seen, however, European and American research evidence makes it clear that there is no simple causal line from phases in the development of capitalism to changes in the organisation of work: the linkage between the logic of capital accumulation and the transformation of the labour process is an indirect and varying one. It is in this context, in reaction to linear macro theories, that the concept of managerial strategy has come to the fore as the supposed source of independent variation between societies, between industries and between firms.

In so far as Braverman considers the nature of enterprise, he adopts a neoclassical view of the firm as an agent which transforms inputs into outputs in such a way that profits are maximised. From this assumption of profit maximisation is deduced a single managerial strategy – securing managerial control over the labour force by separating mental and manual labour and, consequently, deskilling the labour force. In this view, the enterprise is seen as having a goal with unambiguous consequences which are, in general, realised. Andrew Friedman (1977) was the first British author to take clear theoretical aim at this unilateralism, arguing that the goals of the capitalist enterprise can be achieved by different strategies. He argued that the peculiar nature of labour as a commodity (its malleability and its intractable nature) resulted in two types of strategies (Direct Control and Responsible Autonomy) which top managers pursue for maintaining control over workers.

There are obvious parallels between Friedman's simple dichotomy and other conceptualisations. For example, McGregor (1960) also advances the well-known distinction between 'theory x' and 'theory y', whilst Fox (1974) examines patterns of trust, distrust and co-operation in work organisations and makes a primary distinction between the 'low discretion syndrome' involving low trust and the 'high discretion syndrome' involving high trust. Thus the low discretion syndrome, according to Fox, involves the presumption of noncommitment to the organisation with simple, repetitive, prescribed routines; close supervision; harsh discipline; careful checks on performance at short intervals and punitive responses to mistakes (Fox, 1974: 25–30). Low discretion as a set of control techniques contrasts with the high discretion syndrome, which involves the presumption of commitment to the organisation: absence of direct

supervision; non-punitive responses to failures and co-ordination by mutual adjustment (*ibid.*: 30–7). The parallels with Friedman's concepts are obvious, though unrecognised by Friedman himself. Nevertheless, Friedman does advance thinking in this area by considering contradictions within each strategy and the managerial problems of switching strategies. Both types of managerial strategy (Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control), according to Friedman, have serious limitations. The contradictory nature of the Direct Control strategy is based on the impossibility of its ultimate vision – the organisation as a frictionless machine. People are not machines and management cannot ignore the consciousness of workers, because of an ultimate reliance on worker co-operation. Equally, Responsible Autonomy involves a central contradiction in that it attempts to persuade workers to behave as though they were participating in a process which reflected their own needs, abilities and choices, whereas the objective of senior managers is to make steady and high profits rather than tend to workers' needs (Friedman, 1977: 106–8). The latter point becomes particularly obvious when product demand suddenly falls and job security is threatened.

Friedman also points to the inflexibilities attached to each type of strategy. Once any type of strategy is implemented, it cannot be changed at will over a short period of time. Direct Control strategies require well-defined lines of authority and a high proportion of administrative staff, whilst Responsible Autonomy strategies require an elaborate ideological structure for integrating workers as well as some degree of job security. The argument that changing overall management strategies towards labour is a long-run decision means that each type of managerial strategy generates its own peculiar forms of inflexibility (*ibid.*: 107).

The advantage of Friedman's work is that it did imply a more complex view of management. For Braverman, management was a two-stage process of the formal subsumption of labour succeeded by the real subsumption of labour as embodied in Taylorite principles. For Friedman, managers face a choice in relation to labour policies – a choice which in turn depends on the degree of competition in labour markets and product markets. This area of choice is conceptualised in terms of managerial strategy, seen as a set of decisions of a long-term and general nature with attached organisational inflexibilities. However, the central weakness of Friedman's work is the simple dichotomy of Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control. Friedman attempts to salvage this limited conception by arguing that it repre-

sents a dimension. These two strategies, he says in a recent paper, should be conceived 'as two directions towards which managers can move, rather than two pre-defined states between which managers choose. There is therefore a wide range of possible positions between extreme forms of responsible autonomy and direct control, as well as different paths leading in each direction' (Friedman, 1985: 3; see also Friedman, 1977: 107 and Friedman, in this volume). In addition, somewhat contradictorily, Friedman defends his 'simple dichotomy' by arguing that it somehow represents a fundamental contradiction in capitalist work organisation:

There is always a fundamental tension between the need to gain cooperation or consent from those who do the work, and the need to force them to do things they do not wish to do, or to be treated in a way which is against their own interests, in order that the goals of those 'in control' of the labour process can be achieved. This contradiction is fundamental to all class divided societies. (Friedman, 1985: 11)

This assertion of a general and basic contradiction confuses levels of analysis. Such a contradiction, if it exists, may be 'resolved' or dispersed by a *variety* of management strategies. In other words, the control contradiction cannot be treated at the same level of abstraction as the concept of managerial strategies. Equally, the assertion that the Direct Control/Responsible Autonomy distinction is a dimension is not helpful, unless Friedman provides means and methods of measurement. In his chapter in this volume Friedman attempts to rescue his dichotomy by setting out categories of activities (Task Organisation, Control Structure, Lateral Relations and Labour-Market Relations), specifying some of the detail of these categories and then arguing that certain management decision-processes represent a 'strategic dimension'. However, this becomes a far from easy theoretical and methodological step and it is not clear why some things are 'strategic' and others are not. In general, the serious problems of measurement remain unresolved and the Direct Control/Responsible Autonomy distinction stands as before – a heuristic device for researchers and students, which is the way it has been treated in the British literature since 1977.

Friedman's recent work raises broader problems. It should be noted that his categories (Task Organisation, Control Structure, Lateral Relations and Labour-Market Relations) are 'management

activities'; in other words, they derive from and are related back to management strategic choices. In contrast, the categories which I suggested should be considered as elements of the labour process (job design, the structure of control and the employment relationship) are structural elements which may be management activities *or not*. Indeed, these elements are often constituted beyond management at the level of the state (for example, the state is able to alter the parameters of the employment relationship). Friedman's failure to appreciate this results in a misplaced voluntarism concerning management action and an inability to develop the potential to deal with the role of the state, which has become a crucial area for labour process analysis (Strinati, in this volume).

The work of Richard Edwards has also been influential in the UK. In his book *Contested Terrain* (1979) Edwards attempts to pursue rather inconsistent lines of analysis. First, he traces the history of capitalist control over the labour process in the United States; second, he locates different types of control in different contemporary labour-market segments, which divide the working class. Edwards argues that simple direct control prevailed during the competitive capitalist period, principally during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This form of control involved the direct, harsh and sometimes capricious authority of owners and foremen. Unlike Braverman, Edwards conceptualises shifts in control in terms of worker reaction and worker resistance. Thus he argues that the harsh treatment meted out to some groups of workers often provoked militant responses and high rates of labour turnover and after unsuccessful experiments with welfare measures, company unions and forms of Taylorism (note the contrast with Braverman) employers sought other means of control less dependent on individuals and more determined by the structural features of work:

The firm's overall structure, being both more comprehensive than the immediate workplace and having been imposed from a higher level, removed control over the flow of work from the foreman's hands. The foreman's role in the production process became one of merely enforcing a prestructured flow of work activities. Rather than being exercised openly by the foreman or supervisor, power was made invisible in the structure of work. (Edwards, 1979: 110)

The first structural means of control was 'technical control', in which the content and pace of work was determined, says Edwards, by the

plant layout and the imperatives of the production technology. Technical control as a concept shares some similarities with Friedman's notion of Direct Control: both assume a low degree of work discretion, but the concept differs in that it is explicit concerning the *where* and *how* of the detailed control and direction of work. Technical control, argues Edwards, provoked widespread worker militancy, especially during the 1930s in the United States. This type of control had its own kind of internal contradiction; it tended to unify the labour force:

technical control linked together the plant's workforce, and when the line stopped, every worker necessarily joined the strike. Moreover, in a large, integrated manufacturing operation . . . a relatively small group of disciplined unionists could cripple an entire system by shutting down a part of the line. (ibid.: 128)

This interaction of control strategy and worker responses eventually led to the emergence of a second type of structure-based strategy: bureaucratic control.

With the concept of 'bureaucratic control', Edwards returns to the tradition of Weber and organisation theory. Thus he defines bureaucratic control as 'embedded in the social and organizational structure of the firm and [is] built into job categories, work rules, promotion procedures, discipline, wage scales, definitions of responsibilities, and the like' (ibid.: 131). However, he demonstrates very little knowledge of Weber or, indeed, of organisation theory. As a consequence, Edwards relies on a limited number of case studies (Polaroid and AT & T) and on statements concerning managerial intentions and official policy; he ignores the study of informal organisation. Equally, he lays emphasis on regulation by rules and career structures but overlooks the stress in the organisation literature on structuring by more subtle means (see Blau and Schoenherr, 1971; Perrow, 1972: 156). Edwards's exploration of bureaucratic control fails to deal with such considerations. Instead, the concept is constructed at a broad level of generality.

The overall thrust of *Contested Terrain* is towards a statement of a linear process. The first eight of its twelve chapters focus on an idealised, historical analysis. It is argued that capitalists designed new forms of labour control in response to worker resistance, and that in association with the increasing size of organisations and the changing nature of the intercapitalist competition, there is a shift from simple

to technical to bureaucratic control as the predominant type of labour strategy. Moreover, the subordination of recalcitrant workers is seen as the predominant motivating force behind capitalist developments – an unproven assertion. Edwards's second main line of argument is that despite his previous implications, American capitalism developed unevenly with different types of control predominating in different labour-market segments. Jobs in the secondary sector tend to be associated with simple control, whilst jobs in the subordinate primary sector (such as automobiles and steel) are associated with technical control, and bureaucratic control is linked to the independent primary market segment.

The linear picture of labour process development has been subject to harsh criticism in Britain (see Penn, 1982). In contrast, the second line of argument has been received more favourably as an extension of the dual labour markets thesis; as a useful attempt to integrate works on American labour markets with contemporary sociological models. It is the second line of argument which suggests that Edwards is only partly a linear theorist and that his conceptualisation can be used to provide a typology of control structures and management strategies. It is in this sense that researchers have tried to make use of Edwards's categories. For example, P.K. Edwards, in *The Social Organization of Industrial Conflict* – a detailed analysis of the shop-floor situation of seven plants in Britain – attempts to use the categories in this manner (1982: 259). Nevertheless, the conclusions of such research have not been supportive of such ideal types. As P.K. Edwards says in a discussion of simple control in two clothing firms:

Managements pursue a mixture of control strategies in which, in the case of the clothing industry, paternalism, welfarism, repression, and other elements were all involved. To describe such complex strategies as simple control is to ignore the multi-faceted nature of workers' relations with management in even the 'simplest' situations. (P. K. Edwards, 1982: 273)

This argument concerning the complexity of control relations in actual research situations is echoed by Storey (1985) in a recent article. In general, Edwards's work has been rejected as history, however idealised, but his categories have been utilised in a limited and critical way.

Burawoy, like Friedman, identifies two modes of control: despotic and hegemonic; the former is largely the same as Friedman's Direct Control or Edwards's simple control, whilst the latter refers to more sophisticated means of winning consent in monopoly capitalist firms and has clear parallels with the notion of 'bureaucratic control'. Burawoy argues, somewhat simplistically, that 'Anarchy in the market leads to despotism in the factory', whilst 'Subordination of the market leads to hegemony in the factory' (1979: 194). Subsequently, Burawoy (1983) has elaborated on these two types of managerial strategy and added a third, hegemonic despotism. The notion of 'hegemonic despotism' is hitherto ill defined but appears to refer to a new balance of economic forces arising from the greater mobility of capital: 'The fear of being fired is replaced by the fear of capital flight, plant closure, the transfer of operations, and disinvestment' (1983: 603). This enhanced power of capital is associated with new management practices, such as 'quality of working life' programmes and 'quality circles' which, argues Burawoy, represent 'management's attempt to invade the spaces workers created under the pre-existing regime and mobilize consent for increased productivity' (ibid.). In Burawoy's earlier work he does not focus on the history of capitalism, but in recent articles he has suggested that his two basic concepts represent a superior conceptualisation of the development of capitalism:

We periodized capitalism in terms of the transition from despotic to hegemonic regimes. Thus, we characterized early capitalism not in terms of competition among capitalists, not in terms of deskilling, but in terms of the dependence of workers on the class of employers, the binding of the reproduction of labour power to the production process through economic and extra-economic ties. (ibid.: 601)

The further implication of this argument is that capitalism has entered a new phase of economic relations which requires a notion of hegemonic despotism in order to encapsulate the new relations of the labour process.

It is important to note that Burawoy, in focusing more on the overall development of capitalism in recent works, has shifted the nature and status of his concepts. Despotic and hegemonic no longer refer to managerial strategies as such but instead are invoked to characterise entire phases of capitalism. Burawoy partly recognises

this in his 1983 work, when he argues for a distinction between the labour process and what he calls 'factory regimes', but he does not explicitly acknowledge that his concepts shift from being 'two types of labour process' (1979: 194) to being two types of factory regime and then, by extension, two forms of capitalism (1983: 589, 601-3). Thus, having started with the notion of managerial strategy as an attempt to disentangle the threads of specific labour processes, we end up with its elevation to entire epochs of capitalism! Despite the widespread influence of Burawoy's general ideas on control and consent, the categories of control which he identified have not been influential in the British literature, though they have not yet been subject to a substantial critique.

Given this overview of the various recent writers on managerial strategy, we can conclude that there is no clear agreement (albeit considerable overlap) on a typology of modes of control. In general there are two basic questions about typologies of modes of control: first, do they adequately comprehend the various types of control to be found in the real world? second, do they derive from an articulated theory of the labour process at a more abstract level of analysis? (P.K. Edwards, 1983: 29 and in this volume). Faced with these questions, it seems clear that a small number of ideal types (as in Friedman, Edwards and Burawoy), though intellectually appealing, is not adequate to the task. Moreover, the attempts to develop ideal types as an analytic tool in relation to contemporary processes tend to become confused with a historical periodisation of capitalism. Both Burawoy and Edwards attempt to read off the dominant mode of control from the state which capitalism has reached in its overall development or, alternatively, to define the stage of capitalism in terms of their investigations of a limited number of labour processes. Whatever the direction of analysis, it clearly confuses specific forms of control with very general tendencies. This confusion prevents a clear-headed articulation of the dynamics of the labour process with broader areas of concern. With these points in mind, I now turn to look at the nature of the control relationship.

NATURE OF CONTROL RELATIONSHIP

Burawoy best expresses the frustration which is generally felt when considering the question of 'control':

If there is a single concept that has served to generate ahistorical accounts of organizations and to mystify their operation, it is the concept of control. By virtue of its use as a general concept – and by incorporating an imprecision as to whom or what is being controlled, for what ends, how, and by whom – modern social science has successfully obfuscated the working of capitalism. (Burawoy, 1985: 26)

Given these problems and the lack of a good, general theory of power, it is not possible to develop a definitive thesis concerning control, means of control and efficiency/control perspectives in this chapter.

There are various interpretations of the control relationship between management and workers. One interpretation is to suppose a simple and ever-present dialectic between control and resistance. According to such a view, managers are structurally cast into positions where they have to achieve organisational objectives (especially a flow of profits) through others and where the notion of accountability means that the activities of others may be held to the manager's account. Thus a key structural element of management is control. The hierarchical control relation is part of the economic exchange relations of capitalism which require the constant generation of surplus value and the accumulation of capital. These downward pressures affect workers' economic and social interests as a result of which workers and work groups resist this control. In so far as Braverman considered this question, he subscribed to this view; as does Friedman and, more recently, Storey (1985).

An alternative view conceptualises the control relationship as having a dual nature. For the employer there is a central contradiction, a perpetual tension between treating labour as a commodity and treating it as a non-commodity – that is, as a continuing social relationship. The manager/subordinate (or employer/worker) is not a simple economic exchange relationship, even if the material basis is the key to capital accumulation. In particular a contradiction arises because employers are faced with continually transforming the forces of production; indeed, rationality in manipulating a technical system implies constant and significant innovation (Stinchcombe, 1974: 34–5). This, in turn, entails stimulating motivation and harnessing labour's creative and productive powers. Thus employers must to some extent seek a co-operative relationship with labour. However, the pressure of contradictions is not limited to employers; side by side

with labour's resistance to subordination and exploitation lies the fact that workers have an interest in the maintenance of the existing economic relationships and the viability of the units of capital which employ them. Thus, instead of a simple dialectic of control and resistance, there is a fractured interplay of control, consensus and bargaining (Cressey and MacInness, 1980). Burawoy, it should be noted, conceptualises a similar notion of contradiction by arguing that the central problem for the capitalist employer is to secure but also to obscure the production of surplus value (Burawoy, 1985: 32-5).

It is possible to see more clearly the inherent contradiction of employer strategy under capitalism by contrasting it with the central contradiction under state socialism. The contrast is starkly set out in Table 2:

Table 2 Central Contradictions of Labour/Management Relations

<i>Under Capitalism</i>	<i>Under State Socialism</i>
Treating labour as a commodity whilst still eliciting co-operation and innovation.	Eliciting adequate work effort (in terms of the objectives of the regime) whilst <i>not</i> treating labour as a commodity.

According to neoclassical economic theory there should be a free flow of labour into and out of jobs associated with marginal differences in wages; at the extreme, a daily re-hire of the mass of workers. Clearly this is not the capitalist labour market reality, as many radical labour economists have pointed out in recent years (Doeringer and Piore, 1971; R. Edwards, 1979). Nevertheless, although some workers manage to achieve 'job shelters', the pressures of the capitalist labour market should never be underestimated. Collinson (1983) noted that a fear of redundancy was a constant preoccupation of the workers on the shop floor at the engineering plant he studied in Britain: one worker expressed his cynicism about the management style that pretended a community of interests:

'They give the impression we work together when it suits them. But when it gets tough we're the ones who get it. [The company] fires you as soon as it doesn't need you'. (Quoted in Collinson, 1983: 7)

This awareness of being readily dispensable, according to Collinson, resulted in the workers at the plant imposing strict limits on their co-operative and productive efforts (cf. P.K. Edwards, 1987: 208 n. 4). When labour has a vulnerable and limited niche within work organisations, or workers consider redundancy a continual background possibility, then the limits of co-operation are set by financial bribery or short-term economic coercion.

Within state socialist economies, in contrast, most regimes have established a significant degree of job security and strict limits on managers' ability to dismiss workers. This awareness of entrenched job security places considerable reliance on the efficacy of political and ideological mobilisation behind the objectives of the regime. If such mobilisation turns to cynicism (which often occurs), such regimes are faced with serious problems of lack of work effort. For example, here is the account of one worker describing the daily routine in an oil-products factory in Changsha, China:

'Before long I knew the routine. Every day we had to report exactly on time, but after that we were on our own. The first item on the agenda was what the workers liked to call "Socialist news" – tales of the neighbourhoods where those who didn't live in the factory dormitories had homes. These stories of pickpockets and local scandals usually lasted an hour. After that we "changed into work clothes," which took another half hour. Then, suddenly, the shop was empty. Some had gone to the clinic for minor medical complaints, some to the outhouse, some to the financial office to get expenses reimbursed. Others worked repairing their bicycles or making things for friends and relatives like locks, coal burners, and iron chairs. A third group gambled for cigarettes behind the big emergency water tanks.

Organization was near perfect. If any factory leaders came to check the shop or look for someone, there was always a sentry to say, "Oh, they were just here. Maybe they went to the stockroom to get some materials." If anyone wanted to know about a repair job that had been approved and stamped by the repair workshop, it was, "sorry, we're understaffed today," or "sorry, no materials". Sometimes the same jobs fluttered on the bulletin board for weeks.

By 11.00 a.m., everyone magically reappeared, and we sat and chatted until 11.30, when the group leader checked us out for lunch and a two-hour nap. In the afternoon the morning's performance

was repeated. It added up to a full eight-hour day.' (Liang and Shapiro, 1983: 220)

This example describes a situation in China in the mid-1970s when there was considerable demoralisation and cynicism on the shop floor following the struggles and failure of the Cultural Revolution. It represents, perhaps, a low point of Chinese economic development; nevertheless it is not untypical of the contradictions of labour-management relations in state socialist societies. Thus there is the interesting paradox that *both* lack of job security and the existence of job security set up contradictions in relation to eliciting worker co-operation, though these problems of control within the varying labour/management contexts convert into different control dynamics (see Littler and Palmer, 1986). In general, we can say that the labour-market structure sets the agenda of the control relationship; it shapes the nature of the control dynamic. This is because the ultimate form of managerial control is the power to threaten loss of employment – a relation which, in part, defines the nature of wage labour.

In relation to the labour market, it is important to note the peculiarities of the United States context, one which shaped the views of Braverman. The development of job-security and job-protection legislation in Western Europe since 1945 has served to fetter managerial power to dismiss workers. However, the situation in the United States is in marked contrast to that of Western Europe and Japan. In the USA there are no general legal statutes protecting the individual employee against unjust dismissal (Curtain, 1983). This has undoubtedly had an effect on the structures of control which have developed there. Equally, Braverman's paradigm provides no understanding of the recent trends towards contract labour – a trend which has been particularly marked in Britain and Australia. The theoretical emphasis in the literature is on the historical shift to direct employment and direct control. In practice, directly employed labour can represent an undercutting of *employer* control, because of unionisation, work-group influence and state agencies imposing regulations and minimum standards. Contract labour is one means of restoring employer control by rechanneling it through the wage-labour nexus. It remarketises employer-labour relations. In so doing, it depends on high levels of unemployment in order to prevent contractual leapfrogging in terms of quoted job prices.

So far, I have argued that the nature of the control relation is not given by the concept of wage labour; the relationship is more complex. Nevertheless the labour-market context, together with state regulation, helps to shape the control dynamic and to create, in Burawoy's terms, factory regimes. The complexities of the control relation have also been explored by a parallel debate within the organisation-theory literature. This is considered below.

The control system in an organisation is often equated with the system of sanctions. This, for example, is the path taken by Etzioni; his well-known distinctions between coercive, utilitarian and normative compliance reflect this conceptualisation (Etzioni, 1961). However, the system of rewards and punishments is only one aspect of a structure of control and any such system depends in turn upon a monitoring system; in other words, procedures for checking up on task performance either after the event or whilst it is still in progress. Thus control is partly a question of information. The power of a manager, given his ability to exercise some influence over the motivations of subordinates, is directly proportional to the information-carrying capacity of the channels between him and the situations of his subordinates. If we focus on this information flow, there are a number of potential blockages from the perspective of the manager. The factor we are interested in I shall term 'observability', which depends on four general factors:

- (1) Physical separation. Clearly a large and scattered organisation limits the opportunities for visual inspection and as a consequence subordinates often come to exercise more discretion than the official definition of their job roles and responsibilities would warrant. The classic analysis of this as a control problem is Kaufman's study of the United States Forest Service (see Kaufman, 1960; also Kaufman, 1973).
- (2) Congruence of superior/subordinate skills. Access to task performance is not straightforward; it is not always easy to tell from a visual inspection whether someone is or is not doing a good job, or indeed a job at all. It requires knowledge and skill, and if the superior does not have the requisite skills the 'observability' is drastically reduced. One old engineering worker in a British plant commented on the changes in management/worker congruency bitterly: 'Senior managers hardly ever come down to the shop floor now. Anyway, even if they did, they wouldn't know what

they are looking at – they're all bloody accountants, not engineers' (Littler, 1974).

- (3) Production-system insulation. Some work systems entail a greater degree of indeterminacy of activities. In most assembly-line situations tasks are more observable in that the consequences of action/inaction are relatively immediate. However, in many service organisations there is a greater degree of indeterminacy. For example, it is glaringly obvious that most Japanese department stores have twice as many shop assistants as a Western store, which leads to the obvious question – what do they all do? In such situations the notion of task control becomes more ritualised than task-determined.
- (4) Social insulation. Managerial authority does not necessarily imply access to observation. There are institutions of privacy in society and within an organisation, such that a manager does not always feel free to interrupt the work of a subordinate. This form of social insulation has normally been strongest for the professional occupations, though in the British context it was fought for by the craft occupations as well (see Hinton, 1973: 96).

Given these employer problems of observability within work organisations, the typical response has been to construct variously elaborated monitoring systems. This is one structural meaning of the practice of Taylorism. However, monitoring systems are costly and the greater the control problem, the greater the costs involved. Moreover, as Woodward long ago recognised:

management is unlikely to be able to devise enough mechanisms of performance and adjustment to ensure that every aspect of the organisation's activities is adequately covered. Inevitably, in some areas of activity, management has to rely on more or less spontaneous co-operation from its employees . . . mechanisms devised by management . . . always depend to some extent on reinforcing influences in the environment and on the willingness of the people involved to allow their behaviour to be influenced by the constraints imposed by management. (Woodward, 1970: 50)

It took labour process theory some time to regain these insights. The preoccupations with formal and real subsumption of labour at one

level, and the construction of typologies of managerial strategy at another, prevented a reconsideration of formal and informal methods of control. It was left to Burawoy to provide this reconsideration. He has argued that the subjectivity of the employee is – and must be – an inevitable ingredient in the organisation of work, the achievement of production at work, in relations between managers and workers, capital and labour. As such, it must be a central element in control relationships. In this vein, Burawoy argues that the phenomenon that needs to be explained is not the occasional outburst of resistance, the levels of absenteeism, or the restrictions of output but the fact that workers do not resist more and that they are prepared to commit their energy to a degree which is acceptable to employers. The statement that there is a material basis of conflict in capital–labour relations is to remain at the level of abstract class relations, which is misleading in an analysis of actual work practices (Burawoy, 1979: 30; Littler and Salaman, 1984: 58).

Despite the obvious importance of subjectivity, of consciousness, in an analysis of management and control, it is still unclear where to focus this analysis (see Knights and Willmott, both in this volume). For the Frankfurt School the psychology of the capitalist worker is shaped by the family, schooling, the mass media and by the institutions of cultural transmission generally leading to a cultural hegemony. Burawoy returns to an older tradition in industrial sociology and argues that it is the work group and the enterprise itself which constitute a relative autonomy which is crucial in the generation of consent:

Consent is produced and reproduced on the shop floor and is not dependent on legitimacy drummed into people's heads in schools or on character formation in the family. Even in the marginal situations where imported consciousness does shape behaviour, its specific impact is determined by the worker's position in the production process. (Burawoy, 1979: 201)

This is probably a misleading opposition. However, Burawoy is right to argue that the subjective terrain cannot be reduced to a single concept of legitimacy. Indeed, I have argued elsewhere that there is a lack of vocabulary of concepts for discussing ideological relationships. At the least, we need a threefold distinction between:

- (a) General cultural norms which create overarching patterns of legitimacy orientations. A good example is the widespread acceptance of property rights within modern capitalist societies.
- (b) More limited legitimacies which are work-based and organisationally maintained, such as the various ideas supporting managerial expertise (e.g. technocracy).
- (c) The achievement of consent, compliance or acquiescence within the workplace, which often depends on the construction of definite trade-offs and interactions which may have little to do with generating or reflecting large-scale legitimations (Littler, 1982: 33–40).

This argument may be clarified by a specific example. According to Bryan Palmer (1975), under nineteenth-century modes of labour control in the United States many workers saw themselves as the sole creative factor in production. Taylorism and the wider efficiency movement acted to undermine this popular, labourist view and substituted a concept of labour as a passive factor in production, a mere appendage of a machine. However, this ideological shift, whilst buttressing management expertise, did not solve the problem of day-to-day shop floor compliance. The level of management ideology probably served to constrain the generation of alternatives or a broader resistance. As Nichols and Armstrong put it, existing patterns of ideas provide 'ready-made and well trodden thoughtways' and 'Such clusters of theory and value may not be entirely successful in *directing* activity towards the maintenance of the existing order but, for those who wish to *challenge* it, they represent a conceptual miasma which it requires a very sharp knife to cut cleanly through' (Nichols and Armstrong, 1976: 19). This clearly states the significance of broader sets of ideas, but also underlines the fact that there remains a problematic of day-by-day compliance within the work situation which requires different analytic tools.

So far we have seen that the control relationship cannot be derived readily from broad economic assumptions; it has sociological and political components. Equally, the control relation cannot be derived in a simple way from the general nature of organisational structures – there is an area of subjectivity which needs to be understood and analysed. Finally in this section it is necessary to consider the argument that the control relation is not the best means of un-

derstanding the development of organisations and production processes.

Most labour process discussions of managerial control and managerial strategy make some critical assumptions. In particular there is the assumption that organisational structure, at least in part, is the product of control process. Organisations are all about power, say labour process theorists. Such analyses tend to ignore neoclassical economic theories of structure, which assume that efficiency is the key to understanding organisational structure and organisational change. The best-known and most developed economic theory of structures is the work of Oliver Williamson. He argues that efficiency is a more important idea than power in explaining the structure of enterprises:

In as much as power is very vague and has resisted successive efforts to make it operational, whereas efficiency is much more clearly specified and the plausibility of an efficiency hypothesis is buttressed by ecological survival tests, we urge that efficiency analysis be made the centrepiece of the study of organisational design. This does not imply that power has no role to play, but we think that it invites confusion to explain organisational results that are predicted by the efficiency hypothesis in terms of power. Rather power explains results when the organisation sacrifices efficiency to serve special interests. We concede that this occurs. But we do not believe that major organisational changes in the commercial sector are explained in these terms. The evidence is all to the contrary. (Williamson and Ouchi, 1983: 30)

Williamson thus, rather than taking power or control relations as central concepts, takes as central exchange relations and the costs involved with exchange relations (which he terms transaction costs). The argument, then, is that organisations develop and change in terms of minimising transaction costs. Some transactions are best conducted through the market, whilst transactions which involve a high degree of uncertainty, or a high frequency, or have idiosyncratic features involving transaction-specific investment, or some combination, result in a shift to an administered organisation, such as an enterprise. Similarly, these ideas have been used to explain the development of vertically integrated firms in a reformulation of some of Chandler's ideas (Williamson, 1971.) Williamson also assumes that human actors are governed by a limited or bounded rationality, so

that an organisational design should economise on bounded rationality whilst at the same time safeguarding transactions against the ravages of self-interest or 'opportunism'.

In neoclassical economics, organisation design or job design have no particular significance. The firm is a production function, not a complex hierarchy – let alone the locus of interest group struggle or class conflict. The classical theory of the firm assumes that in each case the firm maximises profits with full information and complete certainty about markets, and with no problems of an organisational character. Given these limitations of classical economics, then the theorising of Williamson, which gives a significance to organisation structure, is a step forward. However, whilst this can be acknowledged, Williamson's ideas are still situated within a framework which poses serious questions for control-based theorising. Does the potential of explanations in terms of economic efficiency knock a gaping hole in labour process theorising?

Essentially, efficiency is a complex and multi-dimensional concept. Williamson's concept of static efficiency is market-based; in other words it assumes competitive market conditions in which more or less homogeneous units (firms and organisations) move in more or less given technological and market conditions in order to try to improve their position within the constraints of these conditions. Power is assumed to be widely diffused in such a way that each economic actor does not have sufficient economic power alone to affect the final outcome – a critical assumption. However, if these market assumptions are changed – for example, if the nature of competition is not viewed as static but as a process of dynamic search for quasi-rents and temporary economic power – then the concept of efficiency is not well defined. This is part of the criticism which Du Boff and Herman direct at Chandler's business history. They point out that Chandler minimises the real objective of the emergent large corporation – market control – 'by stressing more neutral or positive aims such as sales expansion and vertical integration, which in reality were substrategies or tactics designed to achieve market control more effectively than open assaults on (or acquisitions of) competitors' (Du Boff and Herman, 1980: 98). Similar criticisms may be directed at Williamson's work, which also attempts to explain vertical integration in neutral and 'efficiency' terms. Thus, efficiency as a concept depends upon certain assumptions about power distribution and if these are not applicable, then the concept lacks explanatory potential.

As I have indicated above, the notion of efficiency does not reduce in a simple way to cost minimisation as an adaptation to a static environment: it is a more multidimensional concept. If efficiency is equated with a series of short-term optimisations, this ignores the importance of dynamic and adaptive efficiencies over a longer term. This can be illustrated by a simplified and abstract example taken from the CSS Report on new technology:

Let us suppose that technology and the associated organisation of work evolve in a series of stages. At the first stage there are two ways of proceeding, one Tayloristic and the other non-Tayloristic, each requiring the same capital investment. One or the other of these is selected, and whichever one is chosen we are again faced with two possibilities, one Tayloristic and one non-Tayloristic. Thus at this second stage there are in all four possibilities, and at the third stage eight possibilities, and so on. If a Tayloristic choice is denoted by T, and a non-Tayloristic choice by N, then a particular sequence of choices can be denoted, for example, by TNNTN.

Now suppose that at any stage, the Tayloristic choice gives twice the improvement in productivity which is given by the non-Tayloristic choice. For example, in the first stage let T give 100% improvement while N gives only 50%. Also suppose that when a Tayloristic choice is made, the number of employees actively engaged in seeking improvement is thereafter reduced to one fifth, the others being robbed of initiative and becoming passive or obstructive, and let subsequent improvements in productivity be reduced in proportion. Then at the second stage TT will give 2×1.2 times the original productivity: an increase of 100% in the first stage and 20% in the second. The choice TN will give 2×1.1 , NT will give 1.5×2 , and NN 1.5×1.5 .

Finally, suppose that each stage, economic competition occurs between those organisations which have chosen T and those which have chosen N. As the first gives twice the improvement in productivity of the second, those which have chosen N will, after a sufficiently long period, be eliminated. At the first stage, those choosing N will be eliminated in favour of those choosing T; at the second those choosing TN will be eliminated in favour of those choosing TT; and so on. Successful enterprises will all make the sequence of choices TT . . . and will have a productivity $2 \times 1.2 \times 1.04 \times . . .$ as compared to the initial value. Yet if a company

making the sequence of choices NN . . . had been able to survive, its productivity would be $1.5 \times 1.5 \times 1.5 \times \dots$ which is higher after the third stage and gives a continually increasing advantage from then on. The substance of this conclusion is unaffected by the actual choice of numbers. (CSS Report, 1981: 79–80)

This abstract example makes a number of assumptions, but in many ways the recent literature comparing British and Japanese industrial development or British and German labour relations puts forward very similar concrete arguments (see Dore, 1973; White and Trevor, 1983; Trevor, 1985). For example, P.K. Edwards argues that the culture of employment casualism in Britain generates mistrust, whereas constraints on lay-offs in West German manufacturing industry have 'encouraged better manpower utilization, which in turn has contributed to work force acceptance of change and to higher productivity' (P. K. Edwards, 1987: 208). The argument at the general level is that a series of short-term optimisations enforced by market competition may be 'efficient', but results in a situation which is considerably worse than it might have been. Thus material static efficiency, the basic concept used by Williamson, is not adequate to explain the path of development.

Gordon tries to sort out the theoretical divergence between efficiency and control perspectives and seeks to understand the pattern of work organisation and technology choice by capitalist employers by making the distinction between 'quantitative' and 'qualitative' efficiency. He defines a production process as 'quantitatively (most) efficient if it effects the greatest possible useful physical output from a given set of physical inputs (or if it generates a given physical output with the fewest possible inputs)'. This transformation definition, involving the cause-and-effect relations between input magnitudes and output magnitudes, is a standard one and we have seen some of the problems with such an understanding of efficiency in considering Williamson's work. However, Gordon goes on to argue for a concept of 'qualitative' efficiency; this is defined as follows: 'a production process is qualitatively (most) efficient if it maximizes the ability of the ruling class to reproduce its domination of the social process of production and minimizes producers' resistance to ruling class domination of the production process' (Gordon, 1976: 222). It is not clear that this conceptualization in itself helps the process of analysis. This definition of 'qualitative efficiency' embodies what Braverman, Edwards and other labour process writers have called

'control' (as Gordon himself admits; *ibid.*: 36, fn. 15) and still leaves hanging in the air the critical question of the connections between the two modes of analysis. What, then, is the relation between quantitative and qualitative efficiency?

Gordon asserts that the pursuit of qualitative efficiency is more important in explaining capitalist development and that employers maximise qualitative efficiency subject to the constraint that the methods are quantitatively efficient. In other words, capitalist employers resolve conflicts between efficiency and control in favour of the latter. If this is true, then the broad explanation of choices relating to job design in, for example, a Taylorite mode along the lines discussed above *cannot* be explained simply in terms of the pursuit of quantitative efficiency. Thus Gordon explains the development of industrial capitalism in terms of the fact that employers searched for quantitatively efficient production processes, but increasing working-class opposition forced them to search for the most qualitatively efficient process. He goes on:

The search began on an exploratory basis. Those capitalists who discovered the most successful combinations gained comparative advantage over their competitors – not necessarily because their costs were minimized, in some prices-of-production sense, but because they were better able to discipline their workers, avoid strikes, and extract surplus product from their labor. These qualitatively efficient processes were copied, over time, and became more and more prevalent. Other quantitatively efficient processes fell away because they were less qualitatively efficient than those which triumphed. (*Ibid.*: 23)

If this type of analysis is correct, then the Williamson-type argument that efficiency be made the centrepiece of the study of organisations and production processes cannot be sustained. However, whilst this may be accepted, it is also true that this misconstrues the nature of the labour process. The labour process is both a social *and* a material process. To put it another way, the labour process is the interface between the relations of production and the means of production (technology, techniques, and so on). Braverman in particular tends to conceive the labour process in a way which systematically neglects the material constraints inherent in any production process. The material character of the labour process needs to be brought back

into focus. This brings us on to the last major section of this chapter – Reconceptualising the Labour Process.

RECONCEPTUALISING THE LABOUR PROCESS

In attempting to rethink the labour process, we are faced with two general problems which are apparent from the literature over the past ten years. First, there is still no clear conceptualisation of the labour process itself, nor of its fundamental elements. Second, as we have seen in the previous section, there is a need to clarify the role given to the concept of control and control relations. In this section I shall attempt to deal with both of these basic questions and, in addition, seek to relate the labour process to the process of technological development.

What is ‘the labour process’? The labour process was a general category developed by Marx in order to encapsulate the relationship between task performance, the objects of work and the tools or technology. According to Marx, ‘The simple elements of the labour process are (1) purposeful activity, that is work itself, (2) the object on which that work is performed, and (3) the instruments of that work’ (Marx, 1976: 284). However, this description does not get us very far. It is essentially philosophical, based on an opposition between humankind and nature (*ibid.*: 283). More usefully, it is important to realise that Marx also conceived the labour process in contradistinction to the valorisation process. The process of production was conceived as a unity, consisting of the labour process (or the immediate process of production) and the process of creating value [*Wertbildungsprozess*]. Within the capitalist framework of social relations, the labour process is unified with the creation of surplus value (*ibid.*: 293, 304). Thus the labour process becomes inextricably linked with the struggle for profitable production. The production process can therefore be analysed into a material process and a socioeconomic process, shaped by the relations of economic ownership. In one sense, the emphasis on the ‘labour process’ in recent literature tends to ignore the mutually conditioning strands of the *production process*.

In chapter 7 of *Capital* (vol. 1) Marx begins by considering the labour process as an abstraction independently of any particular social formation (1976: 283). Later, he shifts to a more specific level of analysis and argues that:

The labour process, when it is the process by which the capitalist consumes labour-power, exhibits two characteristic phenomena. First, the worker under the control of the capitalist to whom his labour belongs; the capitalist takes good care that the work is done in a proper manner, and the means of production are applied directly to the purpose, so that the raw material is not wasted, and the instruments of labour are spared, i.e. only worn to the extent necessitated by their use in the work. Secondly, the product is the property of the capitalist and not that of the worker, its immediate producer. (1976 edn: 291–2)

According to this account, the labour process under capitalism reflects the nature of property relations and entails a general form of control relations. These very general ideas underlie the labour process literature. It is assumed that the distinctive social and economic relations of capitalist society shape the nature of the labour process. The studies within the labour process area share a perspective which regards the immediate process of production within capitalist societies as having a capitalist character in some sense(s). In other words, they acknowledge some kind of relationship of determination between the broad forces associated with capitalism and the various forms of the labour process (Campbell, 1983: 5). This perspective of the studies within the area leads them to investigate what is capitalist about the capitalist labour process and, secondly, what are the links between the logic of capital accumulation and concentration and labour-process dynamics.

Braverman was chiefly responsible for reawakening interest in the above questions in the United Kingdom. As Nichols (1980: 272) argues, Braverman reforged the links between capitalism and work: he 're-united capitalism and the labour process'. Nevertheless, Braverman's own conception of the labour process was, as many writers (for example Burawoy, 1985: 13–14) have argued, very restricted. He regarded the generic notion of the labour process as involving a combination of two basic sets of activities: conception and execution, mental and manual labour. The key characteristic of capitalism was the divorce of conception and execution, leading to the domination of labour by managerial planners and designers.

However, beyond the limitations of Braverman are broader questions. Why does the labour process constitute a satisfactory theoretical object? In other words, is the labour process an appropriate concept for the great variety of economic and sociological activities

which occur at the workplace? In many ways the answer to this question must, at present, be negative. Indeed, some hostile critics have concluded that the 'labour process' is an inappropriate metaphor, or 'a rather empty space for exaggerated conjecture' (Melling, 1984: 83). This is an extreme conclusion, but nevertheless one which reflects in a distorted way the problems which have arisen. There are two main sources of difficulty. First, there is the question of deciding how much of Marx's economic theory is necessarily connected to a specific study of the labour process. Does the notion of the labour process make much sense independently of, for example, the labour theory of value? The labour theory of value is not a set of ideas which are shared by all labour process writers (see for example P.K. Edwards, 1983: 6-8 and in this volume; Onimode, 1985: 66-8). Many labour process writers try to have their cake and eat it: that is to say, they recognise the problem but do not deal with the theoretical implications. Instead, they tend to sidestep the problem. Here, for example, is Paul Thompson's conclusion on the matter:

The legacy [Marx] left was not a complete body of theory without flaws, but rather a series of conceptual tools with which to unlock the problems of the changing nature of work. While it is impossible to understand or completely separate these concepts from a framework of economic theory concerning the functioning of capitalism as a system, it *is* possible to identify a number of tendencies in capitalist production which in themselves constitute a distinct body of labour process theory. (Thompson, 1983: 56)

It is unfair to single out Thompson because he reflects accurately the general unsatisfactory state of labour process theory in Britain on this issue.

The second source of difficulty concerning the general concept of the labour process is that, as constituted by Marx, it has proved an unsatisfactory instrument for empirical and historical studies. In other words, it has not proved adequate for concrete and specific analyses. This is the other conceptual problem with which labour process writers have, often implicitly, been struggling. One mainstream reaction in the British literature has been to try to rethink the basic elements of the labour process beyond philosophical categories or without prior assumptions about the nature of capitalist work relations. Thus, in *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies* (1982), I suggested that we needed a new categor-

isation of the elements of the labour process. Broadly, it was argued that the labour process could be analysed into three elements:

- (1) The technical division of labour and job design. In this category we are concerned with the interaction between technology and the design of jobs. The relevant dimensions are those of task range, task complexity, and so on (Littler, 1982: 7–14). The recent literature on this area has been considerable; see, for example, Kelly, 1982; Knights, Willmott and Collinson, 1985.
- (2) The structure of control. Although the centrality of control varies over time and across situations, nevertheless capitalist work organisations are never, so to speak, control-free. There are always distinct structures through which co-ordination, control and compliance are achieved. This is *not* to argue that control effects are limited to such structures. Organisational structures of control involve such elements as instruction and direction procedures and systems of accountability, monitoring of people and workflows, and evaluation and reward procedures. Although there are various dimensions of control structures, perhaps the most important aspect is the closeness or degree of detailed control in relation to all the above elements. It should be noted that there is a distinction between control in relation to the immediate process of production and control over investment and direct accumulation decisions. In other words, control over task performance considering the enterprise as a work organisation is distinct from control over money flows considering the enterprise as a capital fund. The latter form of control is outside the labour process as such.
- (3) The employment relationship, which is constituted not just at the level of the enterprise but at the level of the labour market, property relations and the state. Employment relations from one perspective concern the relation between workers and both the external and internal labour markets. Thus they involve the consideration of such things as recruitment, training, promotion, lay-offs and dismissal procedures. A critical dimension of the employment relationship is the extent of employer dependence on worker skills and worker abilities generally. Equally, the other side of the coin is the extent to which the relationship establishes the dependency of the employee. From another perspective, the employment reflects the juridical position of the worker. In the

British context the key role was played by the Master and Servant legislation (1747, 1765 and 1823). These laws provided a statutorily based structure through which the courts were able to intervene and control the content and operation of employment relationships. During the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there were fundamentally different perceptions of the work contract held by the holders of capital and workers, based on opposing views of the rights and obligations appropriate to their roles within the employment relationship. This opposition of views represented (in part) a conflict between the workers' attempt to retain the rights of independent contractors and the employers' insistence on their subjection to the restrictions previously imposed on servants. The outcome was to entrench the privileges of 'masters' as the contractual rights of 'employers'. One aspect of this was the right of the master to control the servant not only in what he did but also 'as to the manner in which he shall do his work' (quoted in Wedderburn, 1985: 23). In this way the servant became the employee.

It was further argued in *The Development of the Labour Process in Capitalist Societies* that to some degree the above three elements (1, 2 and 3) could vary independently in such a way that, for example, Taylorised structures of control do not necessitate deskilling. Equally, the conception of three levels of work structuring as (relatively) separate dynamics opens up the possibility of deskilling occurring within the continuing, though modified, existence of craft control. On the other hand, it is possible to use the three levels of structuring to construct ideal types of managerial strategy, as for example in comparing Taylorism and Japanese forms of work organisation (see Littler, 1982: 193).

Another writer who has argued for the importance of reconceptualising the elements of the labour process is Rod Coombs (Coombs, 1985; Blackburn, Coombs and Green, 1985). He suggests a model of the production process consisting of four elements:

- (1) Technology and the technical efficiency of equipment;
- (2) The division of labour ('the pattern of tasks and jobs');
- (3) The 'personal efficiency of labour', which is affected by the nature of the employment relationship.

- (4) The co-ordination function – here Coombs assumes more of a divide between the policing function of management and its rational co-ordinating function than have some analysts.

Coombs then argues that there is an essential and neglected difference between *operational management*, which is concerned with the production process, and *strategic management*, which monitors and assesses the outcome of the production process. It is not correct to argue that differences between levels of management have been totally neglected. Such differences have been given some attention in the literature; most notably in the separation of ownership and control debate (see Berle and Means, 1982; Nichols, 1969). In addition, questions have been raised concerning the relations and linkages between corporate strategy and industrial relations (of labour-management strategy). Both these sets of debates (the separation of ownership and control and the problematic linkage of corporate and labour-management strategies) raise significant issues concerning managerial logic, which were discussed in a previous section. However, up to the present these issues of managerial logic have not been integrated into a labour process framework. The virtue of Coombs's work is that he attempts to meet this problem by integrating the notion of management levels into a labour process framework. Thus he argues that pressured by the market and the forces of competition, strategic management will *over time* press for strategies of change in the production process, but there is no immediate response along Taylorite lines. Instead, there are at least four paths of possible change, corresponding to the four elements of the production process outlined above:

- (1) Technical change: that is capital deepening;
- (2) Division of labour change, such as possible job fragmentation;
- (3) Wage–effort relation change and general changes in the nature of the employment relationship, for example, labour intensification, use of casual labour, use of immigrant labour or use of subcontract labour.
- (4) Co-ordination change.

These paths of change and the broad outlines of Coombs's approach are indicated in his paper in Knights *et al.*, 1985. One critical point to derive from that work is that there is no necessary path of change, no inevitable deskilling dynamic in a Braverman sense. Instead, there is

a flexible coupling between a unit of capital and its production process which allows room for the empirical diversity which is evident from a comparison between, say, Britain and Japan or between different industries within one economy. The sheer openness of this model of the labour process is disturbing to theorists who yearn for intellectual neatness but it represents a useful encapsulation of the state of the debate, arising from the common observation that Braverman posits a unilinear, inevitable and monolithic process which is open to contradiction by counterfactual evidence. In particular, one virtue in reconceptualising the labour process is that it recasts the question of 'managerial strategy'. Management action can take place across various fronts and not always in co-ordination.

However, the argument does not stop at this point. Recent literature, including the work of Coombs, argues that writings on the labour process ignore the wider context of the production process not only in terms of the organisation as a multilayered unit, but also in terms of the material aspects of the labour process. In general, it is critical to relate changes in work organisation to changes in technology. In this case, how are we to conceptualise the processes of technological change? Labour process theory has swung the theoretical focus around from an emphasis on the individual, exogenous theory of innovation to the view of technology as an infinitely malleable tool in the hands of managers – a tool which takes on its existing forms under the impetus of an all-pervasive desire for control. However, as we have seen in relation to the production process generally, the development of technology has been far more complex than a simple reflection of a trend towards deskilling or increasing managerial control. In considering technology, it is best to start with a dynamic analysis provided by Bell, and following him, Coombs.

The argument is that all production processes consist of three different functional activities: (a) the transformation of work-pieces; (b) the transfer of work-pieces between work stations; and (c) the co-ordination and control of (a) and (b). These three activities can be mechanised or manual. Moreover, they are not only analytic distinctions because it is further suggested that there have been three phases of mechanisation which have been the successively dominant form over the past hundred years or so across most industries. The first of these phases (primary mechanisation) ran from the middle of the nineteenth century to its end and placed the emphasis on using power-driven decentralised machinery to accomplish transformation

tasks. The second phase (secondary mechanisation), from roughly the start of World War I to the 1950s, placed the emphasis on using machinery to accomplish transfer tasks. The third phase (tertiary mechanisation), which began during World War II and is still continuing, has placed the emphasis on using machines to achieve control functions. In my view, such an argument is not sustainable at the level of generality which encompasses all industries. Instead, it is possible to outline an 'engineering model' of change which refers to the metalworking industries, and then note the differences from other broad sectors. On this basis, I would reinterpret Coombs's chronology of three phases of development (see Coombs, in Knights *et al.*, 1985: Table 7.1; and Blackburn *et al.*, 1985: 87).

The shift from one predominant mode of mechanisation to another is associated with 'bottlenecks' and with diminishing returns in relation to existing paths of development. Thus the rapid increase in the productivity of late-nineteenth-century machine tools resulted in bottlenecks over transfer systems. The secondary phase of mechanisation, typified by assembly-line methods and Fordism, solved some of the problems of synchronisation and production imbalances by mechanical handling technologies. These technologies created the mass-production industries which, however, faced a restricted diffusion potential because of variations and fluctuations in many product markets, making dedicated automation impossibly expensive. Thus a new bottleneck arose from the problems of extending assembly-line production beyond the mass-production industries without control innovations which permitted flexibility. It is in this context that we should examine information technology or so-called 'new technology'.

However, as I have suggested, the engineering model of change needs to be distinguished from other models, such as that of the process, pre-planned industries (for example, chemicals), many of which combined the simultaneous development of primary, secondary and tertiary mechanisation from crude beginnings to the sophistication of present-day computerised chemical works. Different again is the textile-industry model of change, where developments have tended to combine primary and tertiary mechanisation resulting in banks of computer-controlled spinning machines, but often leaving transfer mechanisms as one man with a squeaking trolley.

Given this type of account of technological change, how are we to insert it into a reconceptualisation of the labour process? How is management action affected by historical phases of mechanisation?

There are two types of answer to this question: one is to link processes of technological convergence and technological clustering to long-wave theory. Technological convergence is a notion developed by Rosenberg independently of any consideration of the labour process. The concept implies that in a certain production context, most firms in a particular industry face similar technical problems and utilise a relatively small number of broadly similar productive processes. Clearly such an idea is only a tendency, and technological *divergence* will occur. However, divergence will often be limited by the emergence of an identifiable machine-tool industry which acts as the main transmission centre for the diffusion of new methods and techniques across an entire industrial sector. For example, there are now only six major producers of spinning machinery in the world, and any innovations in textile processing are restricted to innovations resulting from their products, excluding any new entrants to the market. A notion of technological clustering is straightforward and clearly underpins any broad chronology. In addition, such a notion overlaps with that of technological convergence, but the emphasis here is on the concentration of technical developments within a certain time period because of some initial 'breakthrough', such as the transistor, microchip, etc.

Thus, using such bridging notions, the phases of mechanisation can be loosely articulated with the presumed long waves of economic expansion and contraction. This is the path taken by Coombs – but as we have observed, he sees no need of additional bridging concepts because he constructs his theory of mechanisation phases at a general (all-industry) level of analysis. The argument is that periods of economic upswing are linked to an initial phase of a regime of mechanisation, which in turn reduces the pressure on strategic management to address the question of the personal efficiency of labour. Market opportunities are greater and the production process can be considerably improved by technical changes. An economic downswing phase is linked to the period of bottlenecks in existing technological paradigms, resulting in the emergence of management strategies which are more likely to combine technological organisational and personal-efficiency dimensions (Coombs, 1985). This type of argument is stimulating, but the data are not yet adequate to reach determinate conclusions.

An alternative path to linking phases of technology and labour process conceptualisation is to assume that with each technological phase (based initially on a certain industry) there is a wider move-

ment which has an ideological and social as well as a technological dynamic. For example, the consolidation of the factory system culminated in Taylorism; the emergence of mass production and assembly-line methods is associated with Fordism; and correspondingly there is an emergent ideology associated with information technology. One of the factors which has tended to fix the engineering model of change as the most influential is the origins of the leading management movements. These (Taylorism, Fordism, and so on) have usually arisen from the practices of the engineering industry. These broader industrial movements mediate the impact of technological changes so that the 'design space' hypothesised by John Bessant is closed off in a particular way. The notion of a 'design space' is one which assumes that there is a variable area of manoeuvre in relation to any new technology in terms of work organisation and job design (see Bessant, 1983). For example, information technology, which is still genuinely new, appears to be malleable and to offer a range of options – centralisation versus decentralisation, enhancement of skills versus the polarisation of skills away from the shop floor; rigid controls versus delegation of decision-making over production. The realities of this range of choices have been indicated by the work of Nicholas and Sorge in their comparison of the introduction of numerically controlled machine tools in Britain and Germany, and in the work of Bryn Jones (1982) and Wilkinson (1983). However, these and similar studies all share one common feature, a characteristic difficult to escape: they are all time-bound. They are all sampling organisations at a particular historical point, one in which the form of the technology has not been closed off by a series of decisions and technical developments which in combination constitute sunk costs, to the extent that unwinding them and making a series of different choices becomes an impossible cost burden. Such an argument still supposes that technology is a (partly) independent dynamic, but one which is conditioned by the relations of production in a progressive manner so that the choices *open to management* foreclose over time.

These efforts at both the theoretical and empirical levels to 'decompose' the labour process and re-compose it in relation to broader models of management and in relation to patterns of technological change and economic development offer the best form of solution to the problems which have accumulated within the labour process literature over the last ten years.¹

CONCLUSIONS

In this chapter I have attempted to review the literature on the labour process over the past ten or more years, focusing on the specific themes of managerial strategy and control. Consequently, I have not attempted to deal with the extensive literature on skill and skill changes, nor that on capitalist labour markets. I have noted some intrinsic weaknesses in the conception of the labour process and, flowing out of that conception, in the nature of the theoretical debate and the associated research. The focus on the labour process has to some degree proved to have clear disadvantages. This has been argued most strongly in the British debate by John MacInnes (1983), who asserts that the labour process emphasis on the point of production has a significant theoretical consequence: it places the point of production at the centre of the capitalist relations of production, often ignoring market and political relations. This arose in the British context, argues MacInnes, because the lack of a strong radical movement in the 1960s and 1970s threw emphasis back on to the shop floor as the *apparent* arena of the frontier of control. Thus in the context of the 1980s it is both valuable and necessary to link, theoretically, labour process concepts and state politics. Burawoy has made some effort to do this in recent work (1985) using the notion of a 'factory regime' as an intermediate level of analysis. Although there are still weaknesses in Burawoy's conceptualisation, it is nevertheless a useful one. This, then, will be one critical direction for future research.

The problems of the labour process perspective, as we have seen, have led to considerable efforts to rethink the nature and elements of the 'labour process' and to reconstruct the concept in relation to a more considered view of the interaction and mutual conditioning between the capitalist relations of production and the material aspects of production. This, in turn, has led to considerable efforts to analyse technology and patterns of technological change.² Satisfactory linkages to long waves or long-term economic phases are probably premature, but indicate another important line of future research. More generally, it is important to develop an adequate theory of markets, of the full circle of capital – in other words, to shift from a focus on the point of production to a more satisfactory political economy of the labour process (see Bray and Taylor, 1986). In making the transition to a more broadly based theory, some of the

simplifications of the Braverman-type approach – an inevitable tendency to deskill; a constant management imperative towards direct control – have been and will be drastically modified, leading to a conceptualisation of the elements of the labour process on a non-determinate basis.

However, whilst I have presented an extensive critique of the Braverman-type perspective, it is important to reiterate that the labour process framework has been very important in stimulating valuable research and theoretical discussion in Europe. Some of the early literature and concepts may have been flawed, but talk of crisis is somewhat premature.

Notes

1. Friedman's recent work (see, for example, this volume) is also an attempt to understand the elements of the labour process, though it is constrained by processes. See also Hyman, 1987.
2. One peculiar feature about P.K. Edwards's recent work (see 1986 and this volume) is that for an analysis which calls itself 'materialist' there is hardly any discussion of technology and no discussion of the work of Blackburn *et al.* In other ways, *Conflict at Work* is an excellent book.

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3 Crawling from the Wreckage: The Labour Process and the Politics of Production^{*}

Paul Thompson

INTRODUCTION

Considerable uncertainty exists concerning the intellectual validity and purpose of 'labour process theory'. It is now common ground that such theory is in crisis. John Storey (1985a: 194) sums up what he considers to be the general state of play:

It is not perhaps an exaggeration to claim that the labour process bandwagon has run into the sand. Indeed the catalogue of amendments and criticisms attaching to labour process theory has led a number of critics to call for little less than the abandonment of labour process theory. It has served a useful purpose but it is now holed and patched beyond repair.

Storey's attitude remains ambiguous compared to harsher critics such as Kelly, Rose and Jones, and Coombs (all 1985). We have reached a position where the accumulation of empirical and conceptual qualification of the 'core theory' is shifting towards a more substantial questioning of the theoretical foundations. This is a healthy and inevitable development for clarifying the nature of the debate before us, for as Coombs observes: 'There are those who have done empirical work on the variability of labour process change [but] have not yet clearly deduced the logical implications of this work for the theoretical status of the labour process' (1985; 144).

^{*}Thanks to Peter Armstrong, Jim McGoldrick, David Knights and Trevor Hooper for comments on the earlier draft of the paper. Responsibility remains my own.

I want to argue that labour-process theory can still provide a viable general framework for an understanding of the capitalist organisation of work. Without such a framework there is a danger of a return to an empiricist tradition of accumulating plant studies, differentiated only by appropriating the language of the theory some seem so keen to discard. This in no way implies a defence of orthodoxy, Marxist or otherwise. There is a well-established body of critical evaluation of labour process literature which provides a new starting point of debate. In addition there is a need to recognise and set out the limits and boundaries of the theory; and to restore its emancipatory intent through the development of an adequate politics of production.

QUESTIONING THE THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Retracing the steps

Kelly (1985: 50) argues that debates on the labour process have progressively dismantled the theoretical structure built up by Braverman. In order to evaluate this widely held viewpoint, it is necessary to retrace briefly some of the steps of the debate. The core theory has always been associated with the issues of deskilling and managerial control. Right from the start Braverman's interpretation of trends in these spheres attracted criticism, even from those influenced by and supportive of the general direction of labour process theory. There was particular emphasis on the neglect of worker subjectivity and resistance: both to loss of skills and managerial controls, and to the omnipotent and omniscient image given to management. While these and other points certainly had general theoretical significance, this wave of responses was primarily directed towards specific issues.

The deskilling debate began largely with attempts to qualify or counter the argument that deskilling was an inherent tendency in capitalist production. Braverman was specifically accused of idealising the craft worker, underestimating the constraints of worker resistance, product and labour markets, and of simply getting the extent, timing and variations wrong. The empirical studies did go further than adding qualifications to the deskilling thesis. Central themes included the impossibility – and even inadvisability – of management completely eliminating skills, especially those of a 'tacit' kind: the influences of economic contexts and particular phases of

capital accumulation; the variety of skills outcomes even within the general tendency; and the distinction between whether deskilling is technically taking place and whether workers subjectively experience it in that form. The last point is particularly important, as the biggest problem with the original thesis was not in the *extent* of deskilling but in the implicit or explicit assumptions made concerning its *consequences* in terms of homogenisation, degradation or proletarianisation of labour.

The control debate is strongly linked to the above discussion, given that it has been argued that management utilises its controlling power in order to cheapen and deskill, or deskills in order to cheapen and control. Influential studies such as Noble (1979), which stressed the managerial choice in the design of machinery and work organisation, provided strong backing for this position. Later contributions by Wilkinson (1983) and Child (1985) established that such policies were *one* of a range of strategies pursued by employers when introducing new technology. This theme of alternative strategies to the Taylorist model has always been the dominant feature in the control debate. Ever since Friedman (1977) correctly criticised Braverman for confusing one particular strategy for exercising managerial authority with that authority itself, we have seen a variety of positions on historical and contemporary trajectories of control.

Friedman emphasised the parallel possibilities of management drawing on ideal-type strategies of Responsible Autonomy or Direct Control (for a more recent defence and elaboration of the model, see this volume). In contrast, R. Edwards (1979) used a model of historically successive dominant modes of control – simple, technical and bureaucratic – reflecting changing socioeconomic conditions and worker resistance. Like other theorists such as Burawoy (1979), he believed there had been a general historical shift in the recent period away from coercive, direct controls towards more consensual, integrative strategies, utilising internal labour markets, institutionalised rules, and in some cases work-humanisation schemes. The current recession has placed a number of question marks against this kind of judgement. It is not only in the print industry that we have seen employers use new economic and technological conditions to restructure the labour process and attack shop-floor organisation. Many work-humanisation and participation schemes have, in Ramsay's words, 'faded from view' (1985: 72). Some employers still choose a strategy of 'mobilising consent', but the vehicle is more

likely to be 'After Japan' initiatives such as 'quality circles' and the goals are flexibility and interchangeable labour, reduced demarcation, and greater reliability (Morgan and Sayer, 1984; Littler, 1985).

Recent rethinking has brought even more sharply into question the problem of historicism and the 'Panacea Fallacy' identified by Littler and Salaman (1982). The contributions of writers such as Edwards and Burawoy had replaced Braverman's linear conception of the evolution of control strategies with their own versions rather than acknowledging that there are a number of dimensions and strategies of control, often used in the same time period and frequently in combination. Some show little sign of learning from the debate. Burawoy (1985) now argues that a new period of recession, international division of labour and capital mobility has ushered in a regime of *hegemonic despotism* to replace the old hegemonic regimes. The fruitless search for the all-embracing descriptive and analytical category continues. Nevertheless the post-Braverman debates have established a large degree of common ground, though perhaps no consensus. There is acknowledgement of the crucial mediating role played by markets, whether for products or labour; of the effects and significance of various forms of *worker resistance*; the need to take economic and historical contexts more seriously and more specifically than the rather broad sweep of 'monopoly capitalism'; and the significance of *gender* in shaping all major aspects of the labour process.

In a nutshell, there is an acceptance of the complexity and variability of changes in the labour process. The need to take into account the variety of contexts and influences 'amounts to a shift towards a more "conjunctural" type of explanation . . . but which nevertheless recognises the class nature of capitalist production and the disciplines imposed upon it by the law of value' (Sayer, 1985: 3). A number of writers extend these points through a call for a *dialectical* perspective. For Storey (1985a, b) this requires: first, a relational analysis concerning siting institutions in the totality of their context: second, an analysis which recognises contradictions within structures and strategies: and third, the social construction of reality by active agents. The practical basis is that of a dynamic contestation of social forces, a complex interaction of control and resistance. While questioning the degree to which the first two elements of Storey's analysis are not already present within Braverman, Willmott (in this volume) affirms the third, and adds the notion of praxis to

restore the emphasis on transcending the constraints of capitalist control and class relations.

Necessary though this sort of corrective is, I remain sceptical of how far the content takes us. As Neimark and Tinker note, 'the term "dialectic" masks differences in scope and meaning among . . . researchers' (1986: 2). Frequently it does not take us far beyond the recognition of mutual influence, notably of agency and structure. P. K. Edwards (1983 and in this volume) identifies the major problem: it does not deal with the need for a hierarchy of concepts in the analysis of the labour process – a hierarchy in which the place of the capital–labour relation is given central attention. Put another way, the espousal of dialectics does not take us far towards answering the question of whether the welter of criticisms and alternatives can be incorporated within a labour process framework. This returns us to the issue of what constitutes the core theory. It is widely – though in my view mistakenly – believed that it is based in some way on the specific ideas of Braverman and his co-thinkers with respect to deskilling and managerial controls. If this were true it would certainly be difficult, if not impossible, to pick up the pieces.

The core theory

If, however, we examine the major formative theoretical inputs from Braverman, Edwards, Friedman, Burawoy and others, we find a different core. This concerns what Littler refers to as 'the central indeterminacy of labour potential' (1982: 31). The social relations into which workers enter to produce useful things becomes a capitalist labour process when the capacity to work is utilised as a means of producing value. This rests on the capacity of capital to transform labour power into labour for profitable production, and therefore on the unique characteristics of labour as a commodity. Four crucial things follow from this and further constitute the core theory.

First, as the labour process generates the surplus and is a central part of man's experience in acting on the world and reproducing the economy, the role of labour and the capital–labour relation is privileged as a focus for analysis. This necessarily incorporates relations of exploitation, though it need not and should not involve a labour theory of value (see Hodgson, 1982: Wright, 1985). Exploitation does not depend on the notion of labour alone creating value, let alone socially necessary labour time determining the value of a

commodity in exchange. Rather, it rests on the appropriation of the surplus labour by capital based on its ownership and control of the means of production, and the separation of direct producers from those means. As Burawoy notes, one consequence is that the standpoint of the direct producer is central to a critique of capitalism. One qualification should be added to this first point. There is no assumption that the privileging of the capital–labour relation has any specific significance for analysing other social relations outside production. We are referring to privilege *for* an analysis of production, not privilege *over* any other form or sphere of analysis. Or, as P. K. Edwards puts it in this volume, the ‘problem of “privileging” one part of the circuit arises only if the analyst assumes that this one part determines what happens in others’. This notion of a ‘relative autonomy’ of the labour process will be returned to at a later stage.

Second, there is a logic of accumulation which forces capital constantly to revolutionise the production process. This arises from the competition between units of capital and the antagonism between capital and labour that is unique to capitalism as a mode of production. This logic of accumulation has no determinative link to any specific feature of the labour process, such as use of skills. The three specific features identified by the Brighton Labour Process Group (1977) – the division between intellectual and manual labour, hierarchical control, deskilling/fragmentation – are not inviolable laws. At any given point capital may reskill, recombine tasks, or widen workers’ discretion and responsibility. It is important, however, to avoid lapsing into voluntarism or pragmatism. The accumulation processes that compel capital to transform the conditions under which work takes place and cheapen the costs of production mean that there are constraints on attempts to dispense with hierarchical relations and pressures to eliminate or reduce existing skills, as well as to divide aspects of conception and execution.

The third point follows from the above. There *is* a control imperative. Market mechanisms alone cannot regulate the labour process. As Littler observes: ‘To translate legal ownership into real possession, the employer must erect structures of control over labour’ (1982: 31). There is a parallel here to Marx’s notion of the transition from formal to real subordination. Although this can be formulated to apply to a specific historical period, it should not imply a finished process. Instead it highlights capital’s need to continually realise

control in the context of the pressures to revolutionise the labour process and secure value. Recognising the control imperative specifies nothing about the nature, specificity, or level of control mechanisms, nor is it necessarily linked to concepts of managerial strategy, which is an analytically distinct question which will be discussed later. At a minimum it refers to workers and work being under the general control of capital, or a distinction between general directive control and immediate work processes. The latter are merely open to control. None of the above need in any way be taken as a dismissal or exclusion of control mechanisms that originate outside the workplace, such as those that derive from patriarchal relations.

Fourth, the social relation between capital and labour is an antagonistic one: 'one in which conflict is a structured characteristic' (P. K. Edwards, 1983: 12). Exploitation, the struggle to transform labour power into labour, the requirement for capital to seek some control over the conditions of work and maximise their side of the wage-effort exchange; all these factors create a variety of forms of conflict and resistance. It is here, however, that the most substantial modification to the core theory must be made, particularly in the light of the orthodoxy of Marx and Braverman. A great degree of consensus has developed amongst more recent writers concerning the significance of the contradictory nature of the capital-labour relation – or its two-fold nature, as Cressey and MacInnes (1980) put it. Precisely because capital has continually to revolutionise production and labour's role within it, it cannot rely wholly on control or coercion. At some level workers' co-operation, creative and productive powers, and consent must be engaged and mobilised.

This is not primarily a question of material inducements, nor even general ideological persuasion. Co-operation and the generation of consent are systematically built into the capitalist labour process (Burawoy, 1979; Thompson, 1983). I have summed this up elsewhere:

Workers are compelled into acts of resistance while actively participating in the workings of the capitalist labour process. Conflict and co-operation are not entirely separate phenomena, one inherent in capitalist production, the other externally induced false consciousness. They are produced, in part by the same process. The result is a continuum of possible and overlapping worker responses, from resistance, to accommodation on tempor-

ary common objectives, to compliance with the greater power of capital, and consent to production practices. (Thompson and Bannon, 1985: 98–9)

Cressey and MacInnes add the point that at the same time as workers have an interest in resistance to subordination, they are partially tied to the interests of the unit of capital that employs them. This recognition of the complex interplay of antagonism and co-operation has provided a fruitful basis for significant reworkings of the deskilling and control debates, as well as helping to open up the sphere of consent.

There is a final point here. The analysis presented as core theory draws heavily on Marxist categories, but it is not in my view Marxist. This is not primarily because of the rejection of any specific element of the ‘package’ such as the labour theory of value. Rather it is because there is a direct and empirically unsustainable link in Marxism between the analysis of the capitalist labour process and a theory of social transformation through class struggle. While a politics of production can be derived from the dynamics of the labour process, this has no automatic progression to a wider social transformation in the Marxist sense. I share P. K. Edwards’s view that the labour process analysis outlined above cannot provide a predictive theory concerning the behaviour of employers and workers based on identifiable sets of interests generated within production.

The critics’ case

The core-theory framework makes intelligible the general structure of relations between capital and labour in the workplace. It can enable broad trends to be identified pertaining to specific dimensions of those relations. In addition it offers the possibility of setting boundaries and points of intersection with analyses of other social relations. However, the form, content and historical development of changes in the labour process have to be established empirically, rather than ‘read off’ from any general categories. There are no specific imperatives in the spheres of control, skill or indeed anything else. This framework is unlikely to appeal to everybody. Some critics have gone too far down the road of attempted demolition of any labour process theory for it to be acceptable. In this section I want to examine some of the basic divergences that arise from recent critical contributions.

The most significant criticism of labour process theory is that by definition a focus on the capital–labour contradiction in production reproduces an unacceptably narrow concern with control and fragmentation of work, which excludes and distorts other practices. For example, Tomlinson asserts that:

if the characteristics of labour are the key to production processes then managerial practices must be conceived as above all operating on those characteristics. Managers are then seen as ‘mono-maniacs’ – all enterprise strategies are subordinated to the strategy aimed ‘against’ labour. (1982: 23)

Coombs, too, says that the orthodox labour process analysis cannot explain departures from the trend and that it is also incapable of allowing sustained worker resistance to fragmentation or explaining the phenomena of consent (1985: 144). Kelly uses the phrase *full circuit of capital* to argue that an adequate analysis must be concerned not only with the extraction of surplus value but with its realisation through the sale of commodities on the market, as well as the prior purchase of labour power. On these grounds, ‘there is no sound reason for privileging any moment in the circuit – the labour–capital relation within the labour process – if our objective is to account for changes in the division of labour’ (1985: 32). For the reasons outlined earlier, I believe this last point to be wrong. Nevertheless the general concept of the full circuit is an extremely useful one, and there is no logical reason why it cannot be combined with labour process analysis to build up a fuller picture of the capitalist enterprise. It certainly strengthens the capacity to explain relationships such as those between labour and product markets, and production processes. And as Kelly suggests, it is the disarticulation of the moments of the circuit that are a frequent source of crisis and change.

Unfortunately, the concept is linked to arguments of a much more dubious nature. Tomlinson again:

The general argument here is that the conception of the ‘labour process’ as central to the analysis of the capitalist enterprise is unhelpful because it generates functionalist accounts of management – management fulfils ‘functions required for the realisation of capitalism in relation to labour. Such conceptions cannot then cope with the diversity of management forms’. (1982: 25)

Labour control is downgraded to a factor which is frequently a subsidiary concern. Managers are held to be dominated by problems of the *outcomes* of the labour process – sales/marketing, financial control/cash flow, supply of components, and quality control. A number of other points are made with reference to managerial activity. Whether management gives priority to questions of organisation and control of the labour process is an open and pragmatic one, and stability of production can be achieved without intensifying labour (Kelly, 1985: 65). Existing concepts of managerial control and strategy are seen as unidimensional and zero-sum in character. Management, and even capital, is not necessarily dominant, due to a diversity of goals and counter-pressures. Rose and Jones (1985) go further by wishing to jettison the concept of management strategy as such, arguing that it is wrong to talk in terms of generalised and coherent strategies of control given contradictory objectives, local conditions and different levels of management.

Amongst the practical consequences is that a number of these writers argue that in the current recession there is no identifiable attempt by capital to ‘redraw the frontiers of control’, and no ‘employers’ offensive’, at least of a generalised nature. Union influence and power are being maintained in most sectors, with considerable space for initiatives in the field of job design and expansion of collective bargaining. From Kelly’s viewpoint this is also made possible because ‘job design has no intrinsic or essential political significance whatever’ (1985: 42). Finally, the critics utilise the previously mentioned concept of contradictory relations between capital and labour to advance a specific view of conflict. This is put most clearly by Coombs, who argues (1985: 145) that there is no objective basis for conflict over work organisation. Instead, it is the ‘embedding’ of these processes in specific economic and social conditions which engender conflict. Because the employment relation is constituted also at the level of the labour market, property relations and the state, conflict in the labour process is ‘simply permitted’.

The critics answered

Much of this kind of case against labour process theory is directed at a Bravermanesque straw man and rests on a failure to distinguish adequately between different levels of analysis. Storey’s comment is an example. He refers to

functionalist premises that capital must and can devise coherent systems of control to ensure the necessary extraction of surplus value . . . Owing to the deterministic streak in labour process thinking, wherein capital is deemed to require a certain level of surplus value, a corresponding measure of exploitation, and a narrowly constrained set of control options, the interpretation of managerial action tends to be cursory. (1985a: 194–5)

Now it is certainly true that labour process theory argues in favour of a control imperative, though its 'coherence' is another matter. But as stated earlier, it is general directive control. It carries no specific requirement for a single type of trend, nor even constrained options. The fact that managers are 'global agents' of capital does not mean that at a detailed empirical level labour process theory cannot explain contradictions within that role, and between strata or types of management; or recognise that management is not omniscient or monolithic. After all, the point about human agencies is that they are never ciphers and they make choices within structural constraints. Indeed, the contestation involved in the capital–labour relation, and the dynamic and varied nature of capital accumulation, create many of the conditions for diversity in managerial behaviour.

A similar point about levels of analysis can be made with reference to Coombs's argument that the context, not the nature, of work organisation engenders conflict. Once again this confuses the general structural conditions which generate conflict in the labour process and the social, economic or other circumstances which often shape its form, intensity and frequency. To deny the 'necessary' existence of conflict within the labour process, even as a relatively autonomous phenomenon, is not only theoretically wrong but is quite unlike the reality of any workplace I have ever experienced.

Let us turn to the question of managerial strategy. It is certainly true that management strategies are not always developed with labour's role in production in mind, or at least the predominant concern. But it is very difficult to separate a concern with various 'outcomes' such as product quality, or financial targets, from acting on labour in some manner, given that past and future shop-floor practices will have a great bearing on any of these processes. Ignoring this is naive in that it neglects the role of taken-for-granted assumptions in policy formation about the characteristics of the workforce and the proper role of managers. In addition, as Child notes, 'strategies which are unspecific towards the labour process may still

have relevance for it' (1985: 110). New technology is a case in point. It is rare that new technology is introduced literally *because* of labour-control problems, though they may form a backcloth to the decision, but its implementation has immediate consequences for intensification and transformation of labour. Many employers utilise the introduction of new technology to implement policies of greater control and deskilling, as various studies show (Wilkinson, 1983; Thompson and Bannon, 1985).

On the more fundamental issues raised by Rose and Jones about whether managerial strategies exist at all, a number of authors have rightly pointed out the danger of developing criteria so stringent that by definition no evidence for them can be found. Elsewhere in this volume, Friedman notes that 'Strategies are about intentions and these need not be coherent, conscious or successful'. But even where conscious direction cannot be identified, Storey's point seems pertinent: 'They seem to deny the validity of normal practice in social interpretations of making inference from patterned behaviour' (1985a: 201-2). Storey also correctly observes that they make the existence of a strategy of labour control dependent on the separation of work-reorganisation policies from those directed at industrial-relations issues. Again this is a very difficult and potentially misleading task. The kind of bedrock ideological assumptions held by management that were referred to earlier do not have to be formulated explicitly or even consciously; they simply act as a principle of selection defining what are and what are not seen as 'reasonable' ways of proceeding.

To return to the broader theoretical terrain, capital does not need, as stated in the Storey quote earlier, any given 'level' of surplus value, or 'measure of exploitation'. This kind of description simply reinforces the presentation of labour process theory in terms of the three great evils of functionalism, determinism and essentialism. It is too easy to wave these terms around as a means of instant refutation. Take functionalism, which Burawoy defines as 'a form of causal analysis in which consequence determines cause' (1985: 83). From this view functionalism is a quite inaccurate way of describing the relations between capitalist accumulation and the labour process stated in the core theory. Neither are these accusations effective in relation to its detailed applications. For as Storey and others have noted, later labour process theory has largely moved away from distortions such as the Panacea Fallacy and explored the combinations and varied dimensions of control, management and other

practices. Arguments cannot be proved by reference simply to the mistakes of particular writers. It has to be shown that the 'three evils' are by definition built into the core theory and this has not been done, no matter how many 'musts' and 'can'ts' are invoked.

When it comes to the detailed applications of some of the critics' concepts, however, there are some worrying trends. One example is Kelly's view that managerial job reforms have no essential political significance. Certainly the specific goals and effects of any scheme have to be empirically demonstrated, and in some circumstances both management and workforce can gain different advantages – in spheres like quality of work and task discretion – or may reach an accommodation on any of these questions. This, however, is different from a 'positive-sum' notion of power or control which seems to deny the context of managerial action and the differential resources at the disposal of the contending parties. As Ramsay remarks:

a structural analysis surely could not allow us to imagine that a management device such as job reform in no way bears the marks and so constraints of its social production, even if its result is contested. Such a claim could be possible only if the actual changes introduced are abstracted from the entire context in which they are conceived, designed and applied. (1985: 74)

It is unnecessary to construct such a picture of job reform to argue in favour of a transitional politics of the workplace, which would include intervening in the spaces around such initiatives – something I have long advocated. But such interventions must proceed from a sense of realism about the immediate and future possibilities. It must be said that positive examples of worker-directed initiatives in the sphere of job reform are pretty thin on the ground. The impression is given that this potential has been inflated almost to confirm the larger analysis concerning labour–capital relations. The dismissive treatment of the idea of an employers' offensive by some of the critics reinforces this impression. Of course it would be easy merely to say 'Tell the printers or other workers in struggle that there's no employers' offensive', but that would be insufficient.

Once again it is easy to disprove such a concept when it is presented in the crude form of an undifferentiated conspiracy by the capitalist class, with uniform consequences in every sector. That is clearly not the case. Yet we can identify a medium-term offensive by many employers, for example in engineering and petrochemicals,

which has gathered momentum in the recent period. This has at its heart the well-identified moves towards labour flexibility, breaking traditional shop-floor practices, de-manning, use of subcontract and temporary labour, and changes in arrangements for ballots and for union recognition. Like the deal proposed to the printers, some of the deals explicitly enshrine management's right to manage. These deals are one factor behind higher-than-expected pay rates, as management concedes something in return. Of course it does not indicate the demise of trade unions or bargaining, but much of this process is rather an 'empty-shell', the formal mechanisms concealing the very weak position many union organisations find themselves in, and have to accommodate to.

In summary, the case against the critics is not that the 'full circuit' concept is wrong. Indeed, it is useful to see firms as 'the sites of a complex integration of circuits of capital' (Morgan and Hooper, 1986: 33). Rather, the concept has been counterposed to a labour process analysis and used to downgrade an emphasis on control, conflict and the capital-labour relation. The problem ultimately rests, however, on a seeming denial of the necessary starting point of a level of abstraction concerning the dynamics of the capitalist labour process, which should provide a framework for empirical investigation. One aspect of this is put by Coombs: 'What is needed therefore is an account of the production process and its components in historically specific capitalist economies, not in "capitalism in general" ' (1985: 144). Yet Coombs does recognise the dangers of an inability to determine trends. That worry does not appear to be shared by others. Rose and Jones are quite explicit in their call for a 'plant particularism' based on a contingency analysis of specific circumstances, and an accumulation of empirical studies. The abandonment of a core theory of the labour process and the theoretical/research gains, however flawed, is leading inexorably towards the revival of the largely dead body of one-off plant-level studies. Such an orientation has inevitably led to the 'where do we go from here' sense of crisis.

One of the few things that distinguish the new empiricist sociology and industrial relations from the old is the retention of a veneer of labour process concepts and terminology. It is not new for papers to have little or no connection to an analysis of the labour process except 'labour process', 'control', or something similar in the title and occasionally in the text. Now there is no earthly reason why empirical investigation must proceed from a labour process perspective. But aside from the intellectual confusion attendant on some of the above

efforts, theories and concepts should not be taken from their context and used in a way that was never intended unless a very clear rationale is given for doing so. I believe these developments to be linked, in part, to a trend towards what Peter Armstrong describes as 'managerialising the debate'. On one level this is merely an attempt to 'give more emphasis to the practical activity of management' (Storey, 1985a: 197). In itself, the detailed study of management poses no objections – indeed, it is highly desirable. Problems arise when analysis is directed towards the concerns of management.

For example, Knights and Roberts (1983) begin their article 'Understanding the Theory and Practice of Management Control' by referring to control as a central preoccupation of both practitioners (seen as managers) and theorists. The article explicitly rejects what is presented as a 'critical theory' which associates control 'specifically with domination and the exploitation of labour by capital' (1983: 5). Although the article is critical of mainstream approaches, 'critical theory' is represented as a mere mirror-image of a pragmatism supporting the sectional interests of management. Its emancipatory and transformative intent seems to have been forgotten. The authors' alternative is a middle ground which does not 'take sides'. Control is to be studied as a process, and the knowledge it generates can be used only by those 'actively involved'. The idea of control analysis as a bridge between labour process theory and management theory and practices is also the theme of recent articles by Willmott (1984) and Storey (1985b). Storey refers to a 'common focus of management control'; the new combined insights of management science and social science (essentially labour process theory) producing an approach that will 'draw heavily on contingency theory' (1985b: 289). Willmott is concerned with a more general analysis of management activity, but also calls for the radical political economy perspective (again essentially labour process theory) to be employed not just as a demystifying critique, but 'equally [be employed] to advance or renovate bourgeois management theory' (1984: 364). In addition management, therefore, must learn from the radical frame of reference 'if managers are to devise and successfully pursue strategies that effectively contain the contradictions of capitalist work organisation' (ibid.).

These prescriptions run the risk of helping to develop a more effective 'technology' for deepening and extending managerial control. Storey states that 'The distinction between analysing control and using the insights to refine that control is difficult if not impossible to

draw' (1985b: 270). Only a fool could pretend that any guarantees against such developments could be made, but to begin from a premiss of encouraging radical/labour process theory to be used in this way is a travesty of its nature and intentions. This is both a theoretical and a political objection. The one major disagreement I have with P. K. Edwards (1983) is his assertion that the implications of labour process theory are solely analytical. While he is right to say that the theory is compatible with a variety of political positions, in my view the project is inseparable from the emancipation of labour. For moral and theoretical (to help supply an understanding of subjectivity at work) reasons, this requires a politics of production, to which we shall return later.

BOUNDARIES OF ANALYSIS

Previous discussion has raised the need to redraw the boundaries between analysis of the labour process and capitalist production as a whole. While these attempts have not been entirely successful, there is a problem of both the boundaries and limits to labour process analysis. We are not primarily concerned here with the vexed question of the differentiation of capitalist from other forms of labour process – an issue I have examined elsewhere, particularly with reference to a comparison with Eastern Europe (Thompson, 1983: ch. 8 and see Littler, in this volume). Such questions do, however, establish important points. Not all employment relations in a capitalist society are capitalist: for example, the work of independent fee-earning professionals is more akin to petty-commodity production. More significantly, labour processes in the state service sector are clearly different from their private-sector equivalents. The output of the former is directed towards a form of use value, however distorted. As Burawoy (1985) notes, given that the *raison d'être* is the provision of social needs, it is defined through political relations with the state rather than competition in the market. In the past manning, control and other features of work organisation have not operated according to the same kind of influence from product and labour markets. The difference in labour processes helps to explain Tory drives to impose cash limits, privatisation and a range of market mechanisms in health and other services. The neglect of this sector in labour process analysis is unsatisfactory given its significance to contemporary capitalism. A careful differentiation from traditional

analyses based on the labour–capital relation must be made, and progress is indicated by work such as Cousins (1986) and Dent (1986).

The more difficult boundary-drawing task is to differentiate labour process theory's specific and proper object of analysis. This issue was approached in the early contribution of the Brighton Labour Process Group:

Is the labour process a specific site of the production process of capital, with its own determinations and results? Or should it be seen as one aspect, among others, of a general social production whose various components are subject to similar constraints and determinations? (1977: 23)

They plump for the former, on the grounds that the narrower object sets necessary limits to the influence of the capital–labour relation in production over other social relations, and indeed over the relation between capital and labour at the general social level. The desire to set limits of this sort is surely right, but can the two options be separated in this way? We have since seen the development of the 'full circuit of capital' concept which establishes that regardless of other particular disagreements, analysis of the labour process is an aspect of general production processes.

Ramsay has also more recently called for a reconsideration of the labour process, arguing that the application of labour power encompasses all social activity which facilitates production, including that of the state (1985: 58). But the application of labour power within production and the social preparation of labour power – for example within the family – are governed by different, if interrelated processes. The emphasis of core labour process theory on the immediate processes of production is dangerous only if it either excludes or neglects the influence of other social relations, or 'invades' the spaces occupied legitimately by other spheres of analysis and subordinates them to a narrow focus, and consequent conception of struggles. We have seen the former in the early work of Burawoy (1979), which sought to insulate the labour process from 'external' factors such as race, family or education with respect to the nature of worker subordination. The latter has been a more general problem arising from the dominance of labour process analysis as an intellectual paradigm. It was too often used to subsume other spheres of analysis and therefore became overstretched and vulnerable to attack. Again

there is no need to counterpose the types of influence. As Dow *et al.* (1986: 187) note, it is possible to construct an analysis which shows how 'forms of control of the labour process connect with non-work experiences which reflect the valuations imposed by the distribution of economic and political power in the wider society'.

Feminist relationships to labour process debates are relevant here. There had already been a history of harmful application of Marxist production-based concepts to female labour, such as housework. This kind of problem was partially reproduced in some early feminist reactions to Braverman which sought, for example, to extend a labour process emphasis to the deskilling of the 'craft' of housework (Baxendall *et al.*: 1976). Since that period feminists have rightly insisted on the recognition of the independent influences of patriarchal relations on female wage labour, and have sought to specify the interrelations between patriarchy and capital in the construction of the sexual division of labour in the workplace. Moreover, this kind of perspective has been applied with some success in recent feminist industrial sociology that has been informed by both labour process and gender theories (Pollert, 1981; Cavendish, 1982; Westwood, 1984).

Neither an analysis of patriarchal nor of capital-labour relations within the labour process can on its own provide an adequate understanding of female wage labour. To provide such an understanding each independent sphere of analysis, which has its own boundaries, must be brought to bear on the specific object. It is not a question of the labour process being a ready-formed entity that has 'relationships' with 'external factors'. Nor is it, as P. K. Edwards in this volume puts it, 'a matter of internal or external factors being theoretically the more important but of giving each their proper place and charting their interaction'. There is a relative autonomy that allows us to focus on issues such as control, and a reality that filters external experiences, but we need to draw on other forms of analysis to obtain a fuller picture. This way of looking at things has a more general application. The labour process as a specific set of structures and practices, with a problem area in the form of the previously described core theory, intersects with analyses and practices deriving from other social relations to provide explanations of given phenomena. Despite previously stated disagreements with the work of Tomlinson, this has parallels with his conception of the capitalist enterprise as an intersection point for a variety of practices: 'such an approach brings into focus the importance of the diverse boundaries

which can be drawn around the enterprise and thereby “de-centres” any form of intervention which might be posed as a socialist objective *vis-à-vis* such enterprises’ (1982: 124). It is therefore unproductive to search for totalising explanations, and more useful to see theories reflecting the complex and interrelated layering of social experience.

This restatement of the boundary problem may be illustrated by two further examples, the first of which is class. I have argued earlier, and elsewhere in more detail (1983: ch. 8), that it cannot be empirically demonstrated that there is an automatic relationship between the labour process, class formation and social transformation as envisaged in the Marxist schema. The formulation rests on a number of inadequate theoretical premisses, including the conflation of the relations of production with class relations. Nevertheless there are obviously a number of interrelationships between class and the labour process. The concept of exploitation through appropriation of surplus labour implies the embedding of class relations within the process of social production. But at this level the ‘classes’ of capital and labour are, as Wright (1985) denotes, a structure of empty places determined by the social organisation of production. This is distinct from class formation as such, and the activity of classes as organised collectivities in contingent circumstances.

These ‘conjunctural maps of classes’ are dependent on forms of mediation which include the labour process as well as the state and other factors; hence analysis of the labour process is both informed by a structural analysis of class and helps to shape it, as evidenced by the work of Wright, Poulantzas and Braverman himself. Yet until recently the ‘leap’ from the structural features of the labour process and class to class formation and struggle was made all too easily. This was not simply because people were following the trajectory of orthodox Marxism, because the boundaries between different spheres of analysing social relations had not been adequately conceptualised. This is just one of the boundary problems for labour theorists who are a long way from constructing an adequate understanding of the layers of class analysis. Future development must also build on a number of neglected areas, for example, that of the state’s activity in the reproduction of labour power, and in shaping production politics.

The issue of *consent* can also be used as an illustration. Although Burawoy (1979) brilliantly articulates the processes through which consent is created and reproduced in production, he nevertheless bemoans the absence of a Marxist psychology which can extend that

understanding. Collinson and Knights (1986) also note the 'absence of this social psychology from labour process theory'. In their case study of gender segregation in the insurance industry they correctly emphasise the preoccupation of individuals with maintaining material and symbolic security (see also Willmott, in this volume). From this perspective an analysis of the existential aspects of the production and reproduction of identity must therefore be situated in the 'theoretical black hole' between capitalist/patriarchal structures and individual action. This is indeed necessary, but indicates why a Marxist psychology will not be the vehicle. Such concerns with individual identity do not enter the Marxist analysis of capitalism, including that of the labour process. This means that it cannot generate the conceptual tools. It is rather a matter of how analysis of the capitalist labour process can once again inform a radical social psychology, and vice versa (see Leonard, 1984).

The issue of boundaries between the labour process and class formation, and with the psychology of individual identity, are indicative of the long-running debate concerning the neglect or omission of the 'subjective factor' in many accounts of the workplace, beginning with Braverman. The construction of a full theory of the *missing subject* is probably the greatest task facing labour process theory, bearing in mind the previous qualification that it cannot be fulfilled by that theory alone. At this stage a complete theoretical package is not on the cards. A number of interrelated routes are currently being explored, including those referred to above. In the remainder of this chapter I want to make a preliminary assessment of one of those routes – the elaboration of a politics of production.

TOWARDS A POLITICS OF PRODUCTION

The debate on the politics of the labour process has always tended to lag behind other aspects of the issue. Nevertheless some contributions have been made, and this section seeks to evaluate them. To return to the starting point of the theory: as a few commentators have noted, it is simply untrue to say that Braverman disregarded worker resistance and class struggle (see Wardell, in this volume). Rather, it is an unseen constant or hidden hand in the development of capitalist production. But this version of the missing subject means that it becomes difficult to spell out the consequences of any resistance, and

the means by which it can be transformed into an emancipatory politics. A number of reasons have been put forward for this omission, including those of Braverman himself that he wanted to paint a picture of the working class 'as it really is'. He later added the inaccurate point that the class struggle has been in a state of relative quiescence in advanced capitalist countries (1976: 123); which in turn led to the accusation that he was wrongly generalising from the USA.

I believe that these points neglect the primary factor in identifying Braverman's position. Like other orthodox Marxists, he is constrained by the deeply flawed theoretical construction of the relations between the analysis of capitalist production and social and political transformation. At its simplest, Marx bequeathed the *gravedigger thesis* whereby the proletariat would be compelled to challenge and transform class society by virtue of its objective location in the system of production, although the struggle would increasingly shift on to the broader terrain and be expressed through a political party. There is no consistent evidence that the capitalist labour process does create a class identity of this type. Paradoxically, the evidence from his and other influential studies points firmly in the opposite direction. Traditional Marxist theory concerning social transformation therefore becomes an *impossible burden* either to be displaced on to a different terrain of analysis (a different revolutionary subject or superstructural spheres) or appealed to only by an unconvincing leap of logic.

As Braverman is unwilling to ditch the proletariat in *theory* he has to go in the latter direction – towards the leap of logic. This is shown in the 1976 article referred to above. Here he refutes the 'pessimist' tag concerning working-class consciousness and in an oft-quoted comment states: 'I have every confidence in the revolutionary potential of the working classes of the so-called developed capitalist countries' (1976: 124). The only evidence for this confidence is an assumption of 'enormous intensification of the pressures which have only just begun to bear on the working class' (*ibid.*). We are back, therefore, to that unconvincing leap dictated by the inadequacies of Marxist theory.

Other influential labour process writers have not been so afraid to put forward political perspectives. Richard Edwards (1979) is the most notable example. His emphasis on work contestation should have provided a useful starting point, but that is not how it turns out. Due to the theory that the dominant form of bureaucratic control has effectively integrated and divided workers, for all intents and pur-

poses work is no longer a significantly contested terrain. Class-consciousness has been dissolved into industrial citizenship. The resultant fragments of the working class can unite and advance only *outside* the workplace. This unity is in defence of a representative democracy threatened by a move towards authoritarian politics, as the needs of monopoly capital for state regulation clash with those of the various class fractions. We thus end up with a contemporary form of Leninism in which politics is associated with the level of the state, and another version of a leap from the workplace to political strategy which omits a politics of production.

In the work of Braverman and Edwards we can see an identifiable connection between the failure to recognise the nature and consequences of workplace resistance and the articulation of appropriate forms of politics. They are trapped by their own negative picture of workers and work. This has reached its peak in the recent work of André Gorz (1982). Gorz begins with a powerful polemic against Marx's notion of historical mission of the working class as universal liberator and remaker of class society. This is correctly identified as a philosophical position which cannot be verified empirically. It can therefore be maintained only by dogma or by the kind of emotional appeal evoked by Braverman's 'every confidence in the working class'. But unfortunately he does not stop there. According to Gorz, the link between the development of the productive forces and the growth of class antagonism has been broken. Gorz was a forerunner of labour process analysis and was responsible for a major critique of the consequences of the capitalist division of labour, but whereas he once conceived of worker's self-management and even political interventions within employers' work-humanisation schemes, the working class has now been left powerless by the development of capitalist production. It is incapable of commanding the means of production and its interests are not even compatible with socialist objectives. Thus the very worst determinist tendencies of labour process analysis are brought to their absurd conclusion by Gorz in statements such as 'work is now outside the worker' (1982: 38). This whole analysis is very reminiscent of the Ehrenreichs' view that 'The best starting point, it seems to us, is to accept the most pessimistic implications of Braverman's analysis: modern industry was designed to make workplace struggle, not only difficult, but unimaginable' (1976: 17). It is unnecessary to counterpose the peaks of class struggle to this bleak vision; the ordinary reality of everyday worker resistance is quite enough.

Having rid analyses of capitalist production and social transformation of their impossible burden, Gorz then renders any radical intent in working-class action impossible by writing them out of history. As Byrne (1985) notes, only capital is then left as a historical subject. Curiously, for all his critique of Marxism, Gorz frequently retains the worst of its features. By judging working-class activity in production by reference primarily to global tasks, he does not rid us of the impossible burden but shifts it to his 'non-class of non-workers' who will usher in the era of the abolition of work. In addition he retains the crude notion of a labour aristocracy who are bought off both by their work tenure and by thirst for consumer goods. These debates have still failed to combine an analysis which re-evaluates the impossible burden, while addressing 'middle-range' issues of how worker resistance becomes worker emancipation. Fortunately, in the writings of Burawoy – culminating in *The Politics of Production* (1985) – we now have a necessary and useful starting point.

Burawoy abandons the double burden without setting aside worker intervention in production and society: 'why can we not simply reduce the burden on the working class to one appropriate to its real rather than imagined intervention in history' (1985: 5–6). Later he comments: 'we no longer burden the working class with the mission of emancipating the whole of humanity. Nor, in despair, do we say farewell to the working class' (ibid.: 112). Mechanical Marxism is also departed from through the recognition that a genuine self-managed socialism is only one possible future, and one form of socialism. *The Politics of Production* is a wide-ranging work, with a series of brilliant insights, to which justice cannot be done in a few fleeting comments. But does it live up to the promise of its title? The perspectives are dominated by two interrelated themes: the first concerns a concept of the *spheres* of production and other forms of politics; the second a theorisation of the historical development of various *factory regimes*. The latter are distinctive political and ideological apparatuses which regulate production relations and are the product of general forces operating at a societal or global level. So, for example, *factory despotism* characterised the period of Marx's writings on the English factory system. This regime was a combined product of effects of the labour process, markets, state intervention and other factors and has appropriate forms of production politics. When one regime replaces another there is also a transition in those forms.

To articulate a concept of a legitimate sphere of production politics, Burawoy rightly confronts the two orthodoxies: one in which

only the state arena is a political terrain; the other of a solely economic base, with a superstructure which is the realm of subjectivity. In contrast, he opts for a categorisation in which 'politics refers to struggles within a specific arena aimed at a specific set of relations' (1985: 254). Production politics become struggles over relations in and of production, regulated by the above-mentioned apparatuses. Other forms of politics include those of consumption (in the community), gender (waged within the family over patriarchal relations), and state (global functions as a source of cohesion for the whole social formation). Objections could be made to the detail, but he does offer a set of guidelines for analysis. Unfortunately the capacity to translate these into a specific perspective on contemporary production politics is undermined by the account of factory regimes.

There is a whole set of problems with this idea. It is still within the Panacea Fallacy previously commented on and is not helped by the frankly admitted attempt to analyse four historical, contemporary and potential regimes on the basis of inferences 'from a study of just two machine shops' (1985: 13). Additionally, Burawoy maintains something of the self-imposed constraints of *Manufacturing Consent*, which insulated the workplace from external factors. Although the same mistake is not repeated, the factory-regime concept is still restrictive. For example, he cheerfully admits to having ignored factors such as the Church, nationalism and popular cultural traditions in explaining the Hungarian 'case'. For our purposes, however, these are not the main concerns. The most substantial difficulty arises from the specific characterisation of modern factory regimes. Burawoy describes the dominant regime until the recent period as *hegemonic*. Here capital has moved from coercive to consensual strategies, with the state playing a crucial mediating role in the reproduction of labour power. As a product of the recession a new form of *hegemonic despotism* has emerged, producing a despotic production politics. Consent is still mobilised through 'fads' such as 'quality circles', but the enhanced mobility of capital and new forms of global accumulation decisively weaken collective shop-floor power and force ever greater concessions.

In both regimes worker resistance – and therefore the real material conditions for production politics – appears to be at best minimal. This vision presents the capitalist labour process as increasingly fragmenting and individuating life on the factory floor. Hegemonic regimes effectively integrate workers and even Burawoy's famous 'games' are explicitly ruled out as a form of resistance. English

workers are apparently 'helpless' before job losses, technological change and work intensification. 'Silent submission' is aided by consumer artefacts such as the car and the telephone acting as instruments of atomisation. Only two potential bright spots are allowed. First, the international recomposition of the working class means renewal of radicalism in the Third World; second, pure hope: 'the forces leading to working class demobilisation may also stimulate a broader recognition that the material interests of the working class can be vouchsafed only beyond capitalism' (1985: 152). We are back to another leap of faith.

Burawoy provides some of the conceptual tools to find a politics of production but cannot deliver the goods, given his own substantive analysis of trends in capitalist production and society. One further qualifying point should be added. A significant limitation of defining politics by its characteristic sphere or arena before its goals is that insufficient guidelines are given to how production politics actually advances towards worker emancipation. I have argued elsewhere (Thompson, 1983: 236–45) that we have to distinguish between struggles of resistance and transformation. The former focus on the wage–effort bargain and the frontier of control in work relations. They are not of necessity defensive, economic and sectional, as many commentators believe; but they are limited in their goals. Struggles of transformation embody goals which are directed in some way at the relations of production and reproduction – 'global' issues such as those connected to the ownership, appropriation and distribution of the surplus product, or the social division of labour.

Global issues, though normally centred on state politics, may be brought to bear on production politics, giving it a transformative character. An emphasis on goals does not only qualify definition by sphere; it helps to clarify problems of the forms struggles take. For example: 'trade-union' struggle is often mistakenly identified solely with defensive resistance, yet despite the inevitable constraints on the nature of trade-union structure and action, there is no reason why trade unions cannot articulate and become the vehicle for global demands. The terms 'class struggle' is also frequently used in a very haphazard way to encompass any conflict between the fragments of capital and labour (a similar point is made in P. K. Edwards, in this volume). This surely demeans the concept, utilises class only in the structural sense of the empty places referred to earlier, and is reinforced by the tendency of the ultra-left to 'reduce all activity to struggle' (Morgan and Sayer, 1984: 3). Class struggle does not have

to include the whole of the working class, but the goals and forms taken have to be of a *class-wide* character, whether they are defensive or offensive.

The miners' strike of 1984–5 was a class struggle in this sense, and like others it combined elements of resistance (defence of jobs in the industry) and transformation (the challenge to state economic planning, though this was limited by the refusal of the National Union of Mineworkers explicitly to take such questions on board). There is an important practical follow-on from these issues of political definition. Production politics necessarily tends to reflect the existing structure of labour power created by capital. It cannot be any other way in the normal course of capitalist society, and such struggles and the forms of organisation they throw up should not be dismissed. Nevertheless a focus on worker emancipation requires us to consider what the possibilities and means are for moving production politics towards more transformative goals.

Advocating this direction frequently results in objections from a Left essentialist position which denies the desirability or possibility of progressive reforms within capitalist production. Arguments against industrial democracy, interventions on issues of job design or worker co-operatives, are sustained by a parallel essentialism concerning the character of the capitalist state. Problems such as co-option of struggle and demands, and 'islands in the capitalist sea', are of course very real, but a hostility to transformational reforms makes sense only if revolutionary change is round the corner. As this is far from being the case, the effect can only be a politics of abstention from 'global' issues. In the time-honoured fashion these are dusted off for May Day speeches and other propaganda interventions, whilst day-to-day practices remain on the terrain of resistance to capital.

Elsewhere I have argued tentatively for a transitional politics at the level of workplace and state, whose medium-term aim is to put socialism back on the agenda. Reflecting my own research interests, this has concentrated on issues such as shop-floor counter-planning linked to reworked alternative economic strategies at the local or national state level, and new forms of technology bargaining (Thompson and Bannon, 1985: ch. 7). A more systematic theoretical position and political strategy has recently been argued by Clegg and Higgins (1985). They too start from a critique of essentialism which 'blocks any intervention into the routine practices which constitute and reproduce those [capitalist] social relations' (*ibid.*: 1). This kind of Left position, it is argued, is buttressed by a Utopian belief in a

complete abolition of bureaucracy and the division of labour in a socialist society. Clegg and Higgins's political project utilises the radical reformism of Swedish social democracy, informed by the theories of Wigforss.

The Swedish project is held to have combined an emphasis on economic and industrial democracy. In the former case the recent policy of wage-earner funds, described as 'legislated collective capital formation' (1985: 34), avoid the 'islands in the sea' problem. As far as the micro or enterprise level goes, Clegg and Higgins do not appear to draw on any specific experience, which is surprising given Scandinavian experiments in the extension of collective bargaining and new forms of worker representation. Instead the authors plump for a form of industrial representative democracy based on the work unit and workers' councils. As such bodies must be subject to sanctions as well as rights, they are to be overseen by a 'grievance commission'. Aware that this model excludes the unemployed and non-wage-earners, they supplement it by regional political assemblies. Hence they envisage a gradualist transition in property relations, leading to a post-capitalist society.

The wage-earner funds strategy deserves more serious consideration than it has yet been given in the UK, but I have to admit that I find the rest of the scenario unconvincing. This reformist version of the far Left workers'-council model does little to answer the complex economic and political problems such models raise (see Hodgson, 1984). But this is not the main objection. If the essentialist position overestimates the power of capital, in Clegg and Higgins's account it barely appears to exist. Just as importantly, reforms at the enterprise level do not start from routine practices – for example those connected to the wage-effort bargain and control – but from some external expert model that makes no significant mention of trade unions or existing and potential bargaining strategies. This kind of analysis uses the undoubted limits of workplace struggle to argue for a corporatist strategy in which working-class politics would be expressed through structures of economic regulation at state level (Dow, Clegg and Boreham, 1986).

It seems to me, therefore, that essentialism is not the only danger in developing a politics of production. While reform strategies utilising state structures are a necessary part of any feasible socialism, they must be clearly connected to self-organisation and initiative at enterprise and sector level. Without this, we end up with a politics of accommodation with capital that is based on a 'reforms-from-above'

perspective. In some ways this ties in with the managerial orientation of some recent labour process contributions. For instance, Wilkinson's excellent account of the politics of new technology is limited by a discussion of 'policy implications' which overemphasises social choices for managers and engineers and talks of a 'more socialist management with regard to work organisation' (1983: 97). The labour movement certainly needs to appreciate managerial skills, techniques and practices, but the fundamental guiding principle of a socialist politics of production should be that it is work-directed. If we are honest, most of us at this stage do not know what the nature and end product of worker emancipation should, can, or will be. The political goal of labour process theory should nevertheless be to develop ideas and practices which *empower* workers and their organisations. Anything less undermines the radical intent of the tradition.

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4 Understanding Conflict in the Labour Process: The Logic and Autonomy of Struggle*

P. K. Edwards

The labour process debate had been dominated by arguments about deskilling. This particular focus has strengthened the already powerful tendency towards the emergence of what may be termed a revisionist orthodoxy in which the contingencies of work relationships are highlighted and the error of assuming a logic of capitalist development is criticised. As Salaman (1986: 114) puts it, 'within the Labour Process tradition, actors were omniscient, conscious strategists, aware of, and responding to, the rationalities of Marxist analyses of work organizations within capitalism.' Many of the chapters in this volume reflect a counter-reformation that tries to restore some of the insights that have been lost or confused in the rise of revisionism. Friedman shows that the concept of managerial strategy is useful, and indeed essential. Thompson argues for a politics of production. This chapter concentrates on the analysis of conflict.

The importance of conflict, both empirically and theoretically, is self-evident, but labour process analysis has produced few clear messages. One tendency was to contrast capitalists' control with workers' resistance. This, however, assumed that capitalists have clear strategies, that they try to maximise their own control of the details of work operations, and that workers do nothing but resist this alleged control. Informal modes of accommodation were neglected, and capitalist development was reduced to crises of labour control (for the most developed example of the tendency see Gordon *et al.*, 1982; for criticism see Nolan and Edwards, 1984 and, more generally,

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Littler and Salaman, 1982). Wardell (in this volume) elaborates similar points. But what is needed is an alternative. Revisionist orthodoxy notes all the problems but offers no solutions.

An answer is really not all that difficult to produce. In place of the tendency to knock down the straw men of 'omniscient, conscious strategists' by pointing out that day-to-day relations involve co-operation as well as conflict, it is necessary – as Hyman (1984: 180–2) has stressed – to develop a mode of analysis in which action is given a place but in which such action is not seen as free-floating. There is a 'negotiation of order' involving informal arrangements and mutual accommodation, but the significance of this negotiation cannot be grasped unless it is related to structures of domination and subordination. These arise from the nature of the productive system, in particular the exploitation of labour by capital. As Hyman (1984: 185) puts it, 'management's role as servants of accumulation means that there is a constant drive to reduce labour costs, to intensify the pressure of work, to render existing workers "redundant".' Storey (1986: 45–6) similarly argues – albeit along with some too-easy endorsements of revisionism – that many studies of management have considered the politics of the negotiation of order solely in terms of the micro-politics of organisations, with insufficient attention to the wider structural forces that constrain the apparent freedom of managers.

There is a basic conflict of interest (or, to use a more precise term explained below, a structured antagonism) between capital and labour. This antagonism does not determine what happens at the level of day-to-day behaviour, but it exerts definite pressures. Workers and employers respond to these pressures and in so doing develop traditions and understandings that are used to interpret their relations with each other. Their struggles stem from the exploitative character of the capital–labour relation, but they have an autonomy, in three distinct ways. Because the relation is contradictory, and not driven by a tension between 'control' and 'resistance', it does not impose a direct logic on behaviour; instead it generates pressures which have to be interpreted and acted on by employers and workers. Their relations are also governed by distinct principles, and cannot be reduced to the outcome of influences in other parts of society. And as a given relation develops, it creates logics of its own which shape subsequent developments: workplace relations have histories.

A project to develop these points needs to show in detail how different historical trajectories have emerged, to explain how pat-

terns of behaviour can be related to the shape of struggles and how its analysis can be extended to modes of production other than capitalism. These and other aspects have been presented elsewhere (P. K. Edwards, 1986). In particular, there is no space here to show how struggles develop logics which are neither the outcome of structural forces nor entirely free but which represent the dialectical interplay of structure and action. In addition to my own efforts to show how a dialectical approach works, I would refer readers to Fox's (1985) brilliant study of the growth of British industrial relations. This analyses how choices at one point shaped subsequent developments without losing sight of the basic struggle between capital and labour: choices were not freely made but depended on the parties' responses to the structured antagonism that simultaneously united and divided them.¹

The present discussion concentrates on some analytical issues. It begins by clarifying some terms. The first need, then, is to show that the labour process is a proper object of theoretical analysis: that is, that it is governed by principles peculiar to it and has a relative autonomy from other spheres of society. Its nature may then be investigated in more detail by establishing the character of domination and subordination and going on to assess the meaning of 'control'.

SOME DEFINITIONS

Terms such as 'control', 'resistance', and 'accommodation' have had to bear a good deal of weight, and their meaning has not always been clear. Some clarifications and distinctions of the main terms used here may help. Certain points will be taken for granted, for example the now-familiar arguments concerning the impossibility of specifying in advance how hard and in what ways workers shall work (the unspecifiability of labour power). Other will be merely mentioned. Any analysis deploys concepts which underpin it without being central to it. In an essay on Marxist economics terms such as capital and labour would need careful exposition, but for present purposes they may be treated as given, and defined only briefly.

A *mode of production* is not a fancy term for 'society' but is a way of producing goods. Any mode has technology aspects (the type of tools used, and so on) and its social features, which concern its purpose, the form taken by surplus labour and the mode of exploita-

tion (Cohen, 1978: 79–81). Capitalism is a mode of production in which the purpose is not just exchange as opposed to use, nor even exchange-value as opposed to mere exchange as in barter, nor yet maximum exchange value as against some exchange value, but production for capital accumulation. ‘Capital’ is not the sum of individual capitalists but is a social force stemming from the mode of production: there is constant pressure to produce, and this requires investment in productive capital, the production of exchange value, and the reinvestment of the surplus as accumulation advances. Surplus labour (that over and above the labour necessary to reproduce labour power) in capitalism appears as profit. Workers’ labour power is used by the capitalist. Capital itself creates no new value. Such value is the property of the productive process, wherein workers sell their labour power but receive less than the value of the labour performed. Neither labour nor capital creates value. Workers create that which has value – namely, the product – and are exploited because capitalists get some of the value of what they produce (Cohen, 1981: 218). In capitalism, workers lack the means of production and have to sell their labour power in order to live; this is the mode of exploitation.

The point of this discussion is to establish the basis of conflict between capital and labour. As explained elsewhere, ‘structured antagonism’ is a more accurate term than ‘conflict’ because it avoids two problems: imputing real interests to social actors, and assuming that conflict at this basic level directly drives behaviour (Edwards, 1986: 16–30). The latter worries revisionists, who point out that co-operation also occurs and that capitalists do not always try to maximise their control of production. These points are valid (although the latter needs modification, as shown below), but as soon as some levels of analysis are distinguished and distinctions are made between general features of a mode of production and concrete social formations, their critical force is weakened.

A *social formation* operates under a mode of production, but exactly how the mode develops depends on the unity and organisation of capital and labour (if it is a capitalist mode), the role of the state, and other factors. At a particular workplace further mediations, reflecting managerial strategy, union traditions, and so forth, are involved. It is important not to confuse workplace and societal levels of analysis. Labour process analysis has focused on the former, but its implications can be followed through at societal level, as Fox

(1985) shows. A concern with the labour process cannot be equated with a fascination with the minutiae of shop floor behaviour.

Struggle means the activities of employers and workers in relation to the 'frontier of control' between them. It is not a synonym for workplace behaviour, since it excludes such things as patterns of sociability and concentrates on employer-worker relations. It is not an ideal term, since it can carry the connotation of permanent and self-conscious battles. In the present usage, the term indicates only that there are continuous interactions around the extraction of effort. Apart from its resonance with traditional concepts such as class struggle, it has two benefits. First, because it is located within an analysis of exploitation, it does not collapse into an idealist view that conflict is simply inevitable; explicit arguments saying why a structured antagonism is an inherent characteristic of all exploitative modes of production are rare but vital. Struggles between workers and employers derive their character from the capital-labour relation within the mode of production. Second, struggles are active and creative, in several senses. They represent the working through of structural influences, they mediate effects from outside the capital-labour relation, and they have a dynamic and history – indeed, a logic – of their own: as they develop, they create understanding about how work shall be performed. The terms of the labour contract are not hammered out from scratch every day; in any workplace there are norms as to what is usual conduct. Struggles produce and reproduce these norms, and in so doing they develop logics of their own such that two identical workplaces might take increasingly divergent paths from a common starting point.

The *frontier of control* inscribes the relevant understanding. Some writers (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980: 30; Rose and Jones, 1985: 83) express unhappiness with the idea of a frontier. Burawoy (1979, 1985) prefers to talk of a factory regime to capture the same phenomenon. The problem with the idea of a regime is that it emphasises the formal at the expense of the informal and the rule of management (a regime, according to the dictionary, is a 'system of government') as opposed to the struggle between employers and workers.² The other writers' unease is not really explained, but it is unnecessary. The social relations of work cover several elements: who decides how fast a machine should be run, what rules on attendance exist and who enforces them, how workers are allocated between tasks, and so on. At any given time, there are understand-

ings on each of these. The frontier summarises the overall picture. As a product of struggle it is not static or permanent but represents the results of past struggles and institutionalises certain potential conflicts. To stress the indeterminacy of the labour contract is to emphasise the uncertainty of struggles. But indeterminacy is not complete, and systems of regulation permit some forms of behaviour and tend to rule out others.

These points are elaborated below, as is the concept of *control* itself. But one initial clarification is in order. Within the labour process debate, capitalist control has been counterposed to workers' resistance. A different tradition sees control in terms of job controls (e.g. Herding, 1972): that is, the means of regulating work which workers themselves develop. The present usage reflects much of the latter, being based on ideas of custom and practice as informal modes of workplace regulation (Brown, 1972) and control as the product of workers' behaviour as well as capitalists' regulatory strategies. The term 'control' here simply refers to a system of regulation that arises from the activities of both 'sides' and embraces informal as well as formal elements.

RELATIVE AUTONOMY OF THE LABOUR PROCESS

These definitions take the capital-labour relation as a sensible focus of inquiry in that it has features peculiar to it, but a common argument is that the labour process tradition has concentrated on the immediate point of production to the neglect of other influences. How can the independence of the labour process be established?

It is generally accepted that 'control' cannot be explained solely in relation to the immediate point of production. Littler and Salaman (1982: 164-5) argue that control can be achieved away from the point of production, citing as an example the internationalisation of capitalism and the ability of capital to locate in areas with cheap and compliant workers: 'issues of control become non-issues'. In general, 'the first priority of capitalism is accumulation, not control'. Wood (1985: 52) notes that production is for profit and that 'the maximization of productive efficiency cannot be reduced to labour intensification. Very often the labour process debate takes place in the vacuum of the shop floor.' For Kelly (1985: 32) capitalism is characterised by competition between capitals as well as by the clash between capital and labour. As well as looking at the creation of surplus value in

production, it is necessary to consider the realisation of this value in the market:

We need to consider the *full circuit* [original emphasis] of industrial capital. . . . There is no sound theoretical reason for privileging one moment in this circuit – the labour–capital relation within the labour process – if our objective is to account for changes (or variations) in the division of labour.

Paul Thompson (1983: 70–6) has added a further dimension to this argument. Criticising Burawoy's (1979: 140–57) argument that relations in the workplace are unaffected by consciousness imported from outside, he suggests that workers' behaviour reflects their experiences outside work. He cites gender relations and traditions of trade-union activity as examples.

Braverman (1974) is of course identified as the chief sinner here, although one could ask how guilty he is: if his argument is seen as identifying a general tendency in capitalism and as capable of admitting that other factors may interfere with it, he may be less prone to the error of privileging the labour process than his critics suggest (see Willmott, in this volume).³ Be that as it may, Kelly finds the same error in the study by Edwards and Scullion (1982) of workplace relations in seven factories: this recognises that product markets have some influence on workplace behaviour but argues that 'the primary influence must be sought within structures of control in the labour process'. This was not at all what was argued, if 'primacy' is taken to mean that internal forces dominate external ones. To give but one example: the study found intense managerial control in two clothing factories and explained both its general character and such specific manifestations as very strict monitoring of quality in terms of the firms' dependence on key customers and the competitive character of the industry.

If the 'primacy' charge is dropped, we still have Kelly's worry that what he calls different 'moments' of the circuit of capital are treated as separate factors which can have independent effects on the organisation of work. The answer to this is to clarify what is meant by independence. It is true that some writers treat external and internal forces as separate. Lupton (1963) is a good example. In explaining workers' effort controls in one factory and their absence in another, he listed a series of influences. Among the 'external' ones was the character and policy of the trade unions in each case, even though

these things are not eternal features of unions but reflect the labour processes of the industries in which they operate. His separation of factors is quite unconvincing (Emmett and Morgan, 1982). Edwards and Scullion, however, plainly did not mean that internal and external forces operate without any connections. They stressed that external forces have to be mediated by the internal ones and that similar external situations can produce different outcomes – an example being three factories owned by the same firm, located in the same area and operating in very similar product markets in which very different forms of shop-floor organisation had emerged.

A rather different example is provided by Timperley's (1970) study of a group of manual workers at a new airport. Starting as a set of unrelated individuals, the group began to develop collective controls over group members, notably by requiring tips obtained by some members to be shared with the rest. They then turned to relations with management and, among other things, secured control of the overtime rota so that overtime would be allocated in turn and not according to managerial preferences. The effective leader, moreover, was not, as Thompson might expect, an experienced trade unionist importing his union traditions, but had no previous union involvement. In short, patterns of control within the labour process depend in part on the activities of workers and managers within the immediate effort bargain.

Relations in the workplace can also react back on 'external' forces. The point made against Lupton – that unions' characteristics reflect the labour process of the industries in which they operate – illustrates a more general theme. A particular capital-labour relation develops a logic of its own, and this has consequences for firms' development of new technology. This is the import of Lazonick's (1979, 1981) well-known studies of the cotton industry; British employers did not adopt technologies used in America not only because the nature of workplace relations made this difficult (workers would resist it) but also because the balance of costs and benefits was different in the two countries. And it is only necessary to look at the very different forms of shop-floor industrial relations within the advanced capitalist societies to see that similar 'external' forces produce different outcomes. The concern to avoid over-concentration on the labour process may have moved analysts too far in the opposite direction,

with pressures in the market place being stressed and with the capital-labour relation itself being seen as no more than the stage on which these external influences are worked out.

It is, of course, true that production and realisation are connected: empirically, because any labour process is affected by forces elsewhere in the circuit of capital; and conceptually, because the circuit of capital is continuous. But Kelly's problem of 'privileging' one part of the circuit arises only if the analyst assumes that this one part is independent of what happens in others. It is quite a different matter to concentrate on that one part and to explore its internal workings. That, indeed, what was labour process analysis was supposed to be about: namely, entering what Marx (1954: 172) called the 'hidden abode of production' where 'we shall see not only how capital produces but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making'. The labour process is distinctive because it is here that surplus value is generated.

External influences are often mediated by workplace experience. Mediation is a term widely used but less commonly defined. Wright (1979: 23) provides a succinct statement:

An intervening variable is simply a variable which is causally situated between two other variables. X causes Y which in turn causes Z. A mediating variable, on the other hand, is one which shapes the very relationship between two other variables: Y causes the way in which X affects Z.

In the present case Y, the pattern of control in the workplace, causes the way in which X, external experience, affects Z, or behaviour. Emmett and Morgan (1982) provide an important statement of the process. They liken the walls of a factory to a semi-permeable membrane which filters external experience. They draw on Cunnison's (1966) analysis of religion in a garment workshop: Jews tended to stick together, both as social groupings and in dealings with management. But they argue that to understand the significance of Jewishness Cunnison did not need to go outside the factory to examine Jewish community life. The status took on a particular significance in this factory; in other factories it might play a different role, or none at all. The mechanisms of the workplace may be understood as relatively autonomous forces: 'relatively' because they are not divorced from other areas and because the degree of

autonomy varies between workplaces and over time; but still 'autonomous' because of the distinctive principles involved.

It may be argued that some external forces are simply imported: the superiority of men over women, for example, may not be mediated by workplace experience. But this is by no means an agreed point. Westwood (1984), for example, argues that women's experience in the factory helps to reproduce their inferior position. This inferiority can be seen to be of a different kind from general social subordination: in the workplace it is governed by the production of surplus value and the consequent relations of capital and labour. Social subordination is not, moreover, something outside the capital-labour relation, for it has surely been influenced in profound ways by pressure from the productive system. An extreme position on this is that the development of capitalism has shaped virtually everything that has happened. The revisionist reaction points to the functionalism of assuming that what happens meets the 'needs' of capital, to divisions of interest within the ranks of capital, and to the struggles of other groups. But none of this need imply that pressures from the productive system are no more powerful than those from elsewhere, or that they have the same level of importance. The fact that a society is capitalist imposes certain constraints on its development, and social roles outside the workplace are powerfully affected by these constraints.

Some further comments on this are made below. All that need be established here is that gender roles imported into the workplace do not simply stand apart from the capital-labour relation. They are shaped by it, both outside and inside the workplace itself (for elaboration of this argument, see Edwards, 1986: 97-8, 263-8). Work relations are not totally independent of the effects of gender or race, for example, but they are relatively autonomous in two senses: the capital-labour relation has principles peculiar to it, and because the mode of production exerts definite influences in the social formation 'external' forces are shaped by the nature of the relation.

DOMINATION AND SUBORDINATION

The nature of this relation may now be considered in more detail. As the writers mentioned above stress, it has to be seen in the context of the circuit of capital and the process of accumulation. These have

been widely discussed (Mandel, 1968, 1978; Castells, 1980) and will not be considered here. But one feature of them warrants comment, for it is often mentioned but more rarely analysed in detail. This is the contradictory nature of the development of a mode of production.

A contradiction is not a conflict between two opposing statements. It is a tension inherent in a mode of production (reference will be limited to capitalism; for extensions to other modes see Edwards, 1986: 60–5, 282–317). The operation of the economy generates forces which tend to undermine the principles on which it is based. Capitalism is characterised by the drive to accumulate: it is a dynamic system and needs to continue to expand. But competition between firms tends to drive down the rate of profit, and this is in contradiction to the need for growing profits arising from the drive to accumulate. The tendency for profits to decline is only a tendency which can be counteracted by other forces; yet, as Castells (1980: 19) argues, it is a basic principle of the operation of the economy and is more fundamental than other tendencies. Crises of profitability stem from this contradiction. A further example is the role of the state. Unregulated capitalism requires some central co-ordination if the system is to continue to expand, yet the state, in providing this co-ordination, can undermine the principle of free markets and the invisible hand on which capitalism is based.

A contradiction is something more profound than the 'disarticulation' between moments in the circuit of capital with which Kelly (1985: 49) equates it. A disarticulation means that a firm's production and realisation policies are out of line. A contradiction points, in addition, to three features of capitalism: its dynamic nature; the connections between the mode of production, considered in its most abstract form, and concrete processes; and the internal dynamics of different aspects of the circuit of capital. On the first, as capitalism develops, so different contradictions grow and deepen and new ways of living with them are found. This is not to say that capitalism has a path of development inscribed in certain laws of motion of the mode of production. On the contrary, contradictions place certain pressures on people. Depending on the precise nature of the social formation (the degree of unity or fragmentation of the organisations of capital and labour, the powers of the state, and so on), certain solutions to

contradictions will be attempted. The solutions adopted will affect the subsequent shape of the mode of production in that particular context.

This leads to the second point. The contradictory nature of the mode of production plainly does not determine the day-to-day operation of capitalism. People develop policies to handle contradictions – or, to be more exact, to handle the consequences of contradictions, for people respond to felt pressures and not to the abstract nature of the mode of production. There is no reason to suppose that in managing contradictions in a complex and uncertain world people have coherent strategies; they do what they can in the circumstances. Thus when Rose and Jones (1985: 99), having assailed the concept of management strategy, conclude that ‘much management policy making and execution . . . is piecemeal, unco-ordinated and empiricist’, it is difficult to disagree. But it seems that it is only a very strong and unconvincing definition of managerial strategy that has been eliminated. A clear view of the contradictions of capitalism helps here; as well as saying that managerial strategy is, as a matter of fact, often confused and piecemeal, we need to be able to say why this is so. When it is recognised that capitalism is contradictory, it is possible to begin to develop models of strategy which see the action in question as an attempt to balance forces which are necessarily in a state of tension; it is not surprising that a clear plan cannot be discerned. There may, however, be a logic in what is done; behaviour is not random, and the pressures leading to it can, in principle, be identified. The logic is one of managing conflicting pressures. As argued below, for capitalists this logic is governed by the need to continue the generation of surplus value.

The third point about contradictions is that they exist within the labour process as well as between the labour process and other aspects of the mode of production. This is now a well-rehearsed point, with the work of Cressey and MacInnes (1980) on the dual nature of the capital–labour relation being widely cited, but there is also some confusion about the nature of domination and subordination within capitalism.

Although there is a great deal of stress on the inevitability of conflict in capitalism and the inequalities of the system, there is also much argument to the effect that capitalist control is not absolute and that ‘control’ is not the sole aim of capitalism. When properly elucidated, these lines of argument do not conflict with each other, but the reader of some recent contributions might be forgiven some

confusion. What, for example, do Littler and Salaman mean when they say that 'issues of control become non-issues' in countries such as Hong Kong and Singapore? Have the contradictions of the capitalist labour process somehow gone into abeyance here? Kelly (1985: 42) criticises some analysts of job redesign for arguing that capitalists' redesign initiatives are successful. This argument is seen to rest on the 'assumption that managerial dominance is an inevitable, or a necessary, feature of the capitalist mode of production'. In Kelly's view, domination has to be continually worked for and workers' resistance can challenge this domination. The latter point may be true, but does Kelly really mean that capitalism is possible without capitalist domination? He seems to be confusing two things: the fact that workers can alter the terms of their subordination and the basic exploitative character of capitalism.

Manwaring and Wood (1984) similarly underline the importance of 'tacit skills' – that is, the day-to-day knowledge and creativity that all workers deploy in production: knowing how an individual machine works, developing a feel for correct quality standards, and so on. For Wood (1985: 44) this leads to a questioning of 'the assumption that capitalism inevitably reduces workers to automata'. He goes on to criticise Blackburn and Mann's (1979: 280) well-known argument that the skills in most semi-skilled jobs are trivial and that 85 per cent of workers can do 95 per cent of jobs. For Wood (1985: 45) such a view takes tacit skills for granted, yet the point about them surely is that they are taken for granted and that capitalists are able to have them deployed. They do not counteract the bases of capitalist domination but are among the means that workers use to alter the precise terms on which this domination takes place.

As Armstrong (1986: 12) points out, Braverman had anticipated this line of argument against his own deskilling thesis. Armstrong quotes Braverman (1974: 443) as saying that the concentration of knowledge in the hands of managers has 'left to workers a reinterpreted and woefully inadequate concept of skill; a specific dexterity, a limited and repetitious operation, "speed as skill", etc.'. Braverman goes on to argue that 'the worker can regain mastery over collective and socialized production only by assuming the scientific, design, and operational prerogative of modern engineering' (1974: 444). As Armstrong argues, in the absence of this, the 'skills' that workers have are merely sets of abilities that are deployed under the direction of capitalists.⁴

This is not to deny the importance of tacit skills, only to argue that

the context in which they operate must be taken into account. Some obvious but important points must be insisted on here. They are hinted at by Littler and Salaman, who note that 'control of work' can be achieved away from the point of production (1982: 264). This sense of control seems to be different from that pertaining to the direction of immediate work operations, which is what the authors are considering when they say that control in some circumstances is a non-issue. In short, there is a difference between what may be called detailed control, or the control of the details of work tasks, and general control, meaning the continued deployment of workers' capacities to produce surplus value.

Before this distinction is developed, its basis, together with the basis of exploitation in capitalism, needs to be outlined. If the capital-labour relation is one of obligations and co-operation as well as conflict, how can we say, as most analysts plainly want to, that conflict is not only inevitable but is the basis of the operation of capitalism? The answer lies in the exploitative character of the mode of production. Capital exploits labour because workers are subordinate to capitalists or their agents. According to Cohen (1978: 69) subordinate producers in any mode of production have three characteristics. They produce for others, but these other groups do not produce for them; they are subject to the authority of a superior within the production process, while exercising no countervailing authority; and they tend to be poorer than their superiors. The last point, however, is better seen as a consequence than a characteristic of subordination. The second may also be subject to criticism in that, as argued above, workers often challenge managerial control and are not totally subordinate. This is true at a concrete level of analysis, but it does not affect the central point. Subordinates produce for others under the broad authority of the latter. They may be able to alter some of the terms of their subordination, but the fact remains that capitalists have the effective right to determine the overall conditions of operation in the workplace. The basis of workers' exploitation lies in their lack of effective control of the means of production (Cohen, 1978: 65). Although they own their labour power, they do not own (that is have effective control of) the means of production (land, machinery, raw materials, and so on).

For some writers (notably Parkin, 1979: 23) an emphasis on subordination to authority is a characteristic of a Weberian approach, and Marxists who follow this line of argument are not being specifically Marxist. The method of writers such as Cohen, however, is

different, for it is not subordination as such which is seen as crucial but the nature of subordination as defined by exploitation. The mode of production determines basic features of the capital-labour relation, and it is these features which give the subordination of labour its specific characteristics.

This analysis derives from a view of exploitation as a consequence of the way in which labour power is deployed in production. Wright (1985) has criticised this view and has argued – following Roemer (1982) – that exploitation occurs whenever the fruits of the labour of a producer are taken by someone else so that, for example, an independent producer can be exploited by a merchant. This approach is, of course, consistent with labour process revisionism in its argument that exploitation can occur outside the capital-labour relation, but it stretches the concept of exploitation to cover any kind of power relation and fails to sustain any distinctive view of the production process (for further criticism see Przeworski, 1982; Edwards, 1986: 11–12). An orthodox view of exploitation is preferred here.

A more substantial problem concerns the distinction between productive and unproductive labour and the definition of who exactly is subordinate to whom. This problem cannot be resolved here, but it can, perhaps, be sidestepped by arguing that the distinction between exploiter and exploited is not one between people but is a characteristic of the mode of production: capital exploits labour and this determines various aspects of capitalist social formations, such as the need to continue to produce surplus value and to reproduce relations of domination and subordination. Such structural features are implicated within relations between people, and give these relations their character, but they do not feed directly into the concrete level of behaviour: producers and non-producers are analytical categories and cannot be found existing straightforwardly in the real world.

The exploitative character of the mode of production establishes the basis of conflict. Two considerations suggest that ‘conflict’ or even ‘conflict of interest’ is not a very felicitous term here; ‘structured antagonism’ is put forward as an alternative. First, conflict is not permanent at the level of concrete work relations, and the implication that workers and managers are always fighting over the basic facts of exploitation should be avoided. Second, workers and capitalists have many interests. A presumed interest in avoiding exploitation has to be set against the cost of trying to do so and the possibility that the result may be a form of exploitation that is less desirable than the

existing form. This is not to suggest that capitalist exploitation in particular, or exploitation in general, is inevitable, or that alternatives to capitalism are never sought. It is to argue that how workers and capitalists see and act on their interests is an empirical question. It is true that these two points can be accepted while retaining the language of interests: a conflict of interest between capital and labour need not imply permanent battles or the denial that other interests may be involved (as the debate about false consciousness shows). But potential confusions will be reduced if notions of interests are dispensed with. They either entail use of the inadequate concept of 'real interests' (see note 1, below) or fail to distinguish between structural aspects of the situation and more concrete activities.

The basis of exploitation in the extraction of surplus under definite conditions established in the mode of production must be distinguished from the means to sustain it. Any exploitative relation will contain economic, political, legal, and ideological elements, often with force in the background, that help to maintain and reproduce it. The key point is that these elements are not consciously contrived, and may be in tension with each other. The nature of the mode of production establishes only the most general principles of the subordination of labour. These principles have to be put into practice in the context of the contradictions within the accumulation process and the capital-labour relation itself (that is, the duality of control and creativity).

It is at this level of analysis – the level of the negotiation of the contradictions of capitalism, as distinct from the level of the basic principles governing the capital-labour relation – that questions of tacit skills and the generation of consent arise. It is true that labour processes involve consent as well as conflict and control, but this fact does not establish the revisionist case that the control of labour by capital is on a par with the various processes that create and sustain workers' accommodation within and subordination to the demands of the capitalist production system.

There has been a good deal of inconclusive debate about the concept of consent. Burawoy (1979) makes much of it and has argued, as against Richard Edwards (1979), that mere compliance with formal rules is not sufficient for the capitalist: capitalists also need the willing consent of workers in doing their work task (Burawoy, 1981), a point which analyses of tacit skills are also at pains to stress. If the notion of 'rules' is taken strictly, as meaning formal organisational requirements, obedience to rules is plainly not

enough. The whole point of Baldamus's (1961) analysis was to show that no set of rules, however detailed, can prescribe conduct. The further employers move in such a direction, moreover, the more they stultify workers' creativity. Burawoy appears to go too far in the opposite direction by insisting that active consent is required. If obedience is taken to include staying within informal rules and understandings, the problem becomes less significant. There are degrees of consent, and counterposing mere compliance and active consent is not helpful. Terms such as these plainly need to be used, but trying to establish a precise definition of them may not get very far. What is important is the way in which workers' consent (or, to use a term which implies less of a pre-judgement about the depth of workers' acceptance of the rules of the game, workers' compliance) is created and sustained through a complex of overlapping – and sometimes conflicting – forces. Consent, like conflict, cannot be reduced to a single measure. The analytical task is to explore its nature and its constituent parts.

One brief comment on the origins of consent ties this discussion to the earlier argument for the relative autonomy of the labour process. 'Consent' which apparently arises outside the workplace – for example, the acceptance of discipline and 'good work habits' inculcated in schools – may in fact be generated by pressures stemming from the capital-labour relation. Lazonick (1978) has shown how the emerging capitalist system of the nineteenth century put definite demands on the educational system for a supply of workers who were not so much trained in technical skills as imbued with the values of obedience to authority. Joyce (1982) argues that Lancashire cotton workers' acceptance of bourgeois politics in the public arena rested on a class compromise within the factory: a compromise between capital and labour in the workplace fed through to a broader political compromise. And studies of folk festivals (for example Yeo and Yeo, 1981) have demonstrated how pre-capitalist rhythms were contained into a routinised and regimented leisure that was increasingly divorced from work and yet reflected the growing subordination of workers within new forms of capitalist authority. In these and other cases there was a quite clear impact of work relations on other features of society. Traditional leisure activities, for example, were potentially subversive, and were destroyed. This does not mean that there was necessarily a deliberate plan by capitalists to secure this end. Definite pressures were generated from the productive system and developments in education or patterns of leisure that were

consistent with these pressures were encouraged, while others were discouraged.⁵ Struggles arising from the capital-labour relation can be seen as shaping social relations more generally in ways which have no counterpart in influences running in the opposite direction.

The argument so far has concentrated on the principles underpinning the labour process and its autonomy from other aspects of society. In particular, in analysing conflict it is necessary to distinguish between structured antagonisms in the mode of production, conflict in the sense of the shape and position of the frontier of control, and day-to-day relations between employers and workers. To draw the discussion together, it is useful to indicate how appropriate concepts may be developed to consider the last, and most concrete, of these levels of analysis.

CONTROL AND STRUGGLE IN THE WORKPLACE

Control: detailed

As noted above, control is one of the most widely used – and disputed – terms in accounts of how workers are persuaded to work. It can refer to the details of how work operations are conducted or to some more general acceptance by workers of capitalist authority. The approach adopted here is to abandon the idea that control is necessarily the product of deliberate intent on the part of managers or workers. Of course both sides are trying to influence the conduct of the labour process, and policies and practices continually develop. But to equate control with intended effects raises acute problems with identifying these effects and with showing that the various, and sometimes competing, methods of influencing the shape of the effort bargain stem from a coherent policy. Perhaps most damaging of all, there is the danger of treating control as something in which only managements engage, with workers being cast in an entirely reactive role.

It seems preferable to see control as a pattern which emerges from the process of struggle. Not only does this help to deal with the problem of intentionality but it also serves to stress the multi-faceted nature of control. It is not a matter of an employer developing one overarching system of control, but of the development of several linkages between the firm and its employees. As Geller (1979) stresses in the case of Ford during the 1920s, which is sometimes taken as an example of ‘technical control’, several different mechan-

isms existed: the economic incentive of high wages, the coercion of intense supervision, the pacing of work operations imposed by the moving assembly line, and the promise of company welfare schemes combined with the threat of removal of access to them if a worker was found to have an immoral or otherwise unsatisfactory life outside the plant as judged by the firm's notorious Sociological Department (on all of which see Meyer, 1981; note that payment of the celebrated five-dollar rate was not automatic but dependent on 'good habits' both at work and outside). In general, control is a term summarising a set of mechanisms and practices that regulate the terms of the labour process. Although the Ford case is useful in stressing the number of aspects of control, it may be unusual in its extent of deliberate managerial planning.

Seeing control in terms of the outcome of struggles enables a distinction to be drawn between detailed and general control. The former refers to the immediate work process and is a zero-sum category; if workers control a given issue, then capitalists cannot do so. How fast a machine should be run, for example, can be determined by managers, by workers, or by negotiation (taking the last term to include informal arrangements as well as formal agreements). Detailed control on all such issues concerning work tasks can, as noted above, be summarised in a frontier of control. As the analogy of a frontier suggests, there is a range of separate elements, each relating to the terrain of job control. These are not directly commensurable. Control of manning levels is different from that of the allocation of overtime, and elements can vary independently of each other.

The position of the frontier is not, moreover, the end of the story. It is also necessary to know, first, how firmly established it is. On the important and rather neglected issue of the right of management to move workers between jobs, for example, some managements have an almost unrestrained freedom (see, for example, Linhart's [1981] description of a Citroën factory). Others are limited by customary understanding and yet others by more formal rules, together with the threat of sanctions if these rules are broken. Second, the implications of a frontier have to be assessed. The controls of labour allocation enjoyed by 'autonomous work groups' are different from those of the same thing practised by gangs of workers who have wrested them from management. In the latter case, the controls are part of an awareness of contest over the effort bargain. In the former, they are the gift of management and may be part of a system of managerial

hegemony: detailed controls are ceded to workers, and managers have the immediate gain that some 'managerial' tasks are carried out by workers, together with a broader accommodation of the workers within existing structures of authority. Third, frontiers are not static and can be openly challenged as product market and other external circumstances change.

The most sensible criticism of the idea of a frontier arises from the combination of conflict and consent that characterises any labour process. Consider, for example, the famous 'indulgency pattern' analysed by Gouldner (1954). Formal rules were bent or ignored, and informal understandings were more important in determining how work was performed. Does not the frontier of control reduce such mutual accommodations, which had costs and benefits to workers and managers, to a simple zero-sum measure of power? Such a view confuses the place of the frontier with the conditions sustaining it. It is perfectly sensible to inquire whether Gouldner's workers or their supervisors determined work assignments and to treat the answer in zero-sum terms. This can then lead to further investigation of the social relationships sustaining and reflected in the arrangements.

Why bother? The key point about a frontier of control is that it both summarises the results of earlier struggles and shapes the possibilities of future ones. On the latter, it is not adequate to identify, in workers' ability to influence how their labour power is deployed, an undifferentiated capacity for 'resistance'. The capacity to resist has to be developed and sustained, and the forms taken by resistance depend on the types of control currently in operation. This is the basic argument of the study defended earlier (Edwards and Scullion, 1982).⁶ Why, for example, do some workers have the ability to engage in such familiar practices as 'output restriction' while others do not? Why do some have powerful controls of recruitment and work allocation? The answers lie in the way in which the frontier of control has developed – ways obviously influenced by product-market forces and other external factors, but also shaped by struggles at the point of production.

To take one example: skilled workers in one factory (called by Edwards and Scullion the Components Factory) controlled work allocation by insisting that no one could move between one type of machine and another, and overtime by demanding that management could not ask individual workers to do overtime as conditions required, having instead to offer overtime to the whole shop for a

twelve-week period. Production workers in the same factory lacked these controls. In terms of overt conflict, certain consequences followed. Certain sanctions, such as a general withdrawal of co-operation, were more readily available to the skilled than to the production workers. A go-slow, for example, was an easy weapon for the former but much more difficult for the latter to sustain. An understanding of the forms taken by 'industrial conflict' depends on seeing how these forms were sustained by particular patterns of control. It is also possible to consider the origins of a pattern by considering employers' policies, the cohesion of the workforce, and so on. The key point for present purposes is that tools are available for the analysis of a crucial – but, as noted below (note 1), neglected – aspect of workplace relations: namely, overt conflict.

To concentrate on detailed control and the patterns of behaviour associated with it is to examine struggles in their own right, but it is often argued that such struggles do not bring the basis of exploitation into the open. In the familiar terms used by Burawoy (1979) workers' games of 'making-out' produce consent to the rules of the game. This raises the question of general control.

General control

Like detailed control, general control refers not to intentions but to patterns of effects. It reflects the extent to which workers are successfully subordinated to the production of surplus value. Not too great a weight should be placed on the term. It is introduced not because of its inherent analytical power but to distinguish between senses with which the term 'control' is used. Thus, when Littler and Salaman say that in some circumstances control is a non-issue, they do not mean that antagonism between capital and labour has been abolished. They mean that open struggles for detailed control are absent and that the production of surplus value is proceeding smoothly. General control refers to this.

General control is not a zero-sum concept, because 'amounts' of it cannot be added up. It is not control in the sense of the power to decide particular parts of the effort bargain but an indication of the overall effectiveness of the productive system. It does not depend on detailed control, as a familiar example makes clear: a firm which cedes to workers a degree of autonomy at shop level through job enlargement or team working can reap gains in the form of improved

'motivation' and productivity. This is not to equate general control with such concrete outcomes, but only to underline the basis of the concept.

Is general control even measurable? Not in any direct fashion, although it may be possible to say that it has increased or decreased. Consider the well-known analysis of British industrial relations of the 1960s which argued that there was a creeping disorder on the shop floor (Fox and Flanders, 1970). The assumptions underpinning this analysis have been criticised extensively (Goldthorpe, 1977; Hyman, 1975). But its basic point – that British capitalism was finding it increasingly difficult to secure compliance on the shop floor – has been accepted, and indeed stressed by those seeing in the same trends an emergence of working-class consciousness. It was thus hard to control wage inflation, productivity bargaining turned into a shambles, efforts to reform labour relations through the law came to nothing, and so on. General control was weakening.

An important corollary follows from this approach. A decline in general control does not have to be caused by deliberate working-class pressure. Goldthorpe (1977) criticised the 'pluralist' argument of Fox and Flanders for – among other things – neglecting the fact that what looked like disorder to management and union officials could well reflect the wishes of rank-and-file workers trying to improve their working conditions. The revisionist reply to this, offered by Maitland (1983), is that there is no evidence that workers like or seek such concomitants of disorder as frequent disputes and constant mistrust between them and management. This is to miss the point: disorder can be the unintended product of other actions, in this case a pursuit of job security and increased earnings using the only means at workers' disposal: pressure at the point of production. Workers may not like disorder but it may be seen as the outcome of their struggles, which reflected the shape of workplace industrial relations and the impact of intensifying problems in the wider economy.

In this case, the conduct of workplace relations may have exacerbated other far more fundamental weaknesses in the economy. This approach helps to take analysis beyond debate on the specifics involved. Scholars wanting to see 'class struggle' as an important feature of developments were pressed into arguing that shop-floor workers were rejecting capitalist authority. Goldthorpe and others questioned whether this was so, but there is no need to see struggle in this way. Workplace struggle need not be aimed at undermining

capitalist authority as a whole. In some circumstances it can contribute to a crisis of general control. In others – for example the Great Depression of the 1930s – an accumulation crisis surely reflected quite different influences. How detailed and general control are articulated will depend on the internal dynamics of particular struggles around detailed control and on the context of the accumulation process. In the case of the 1960s it is not a matter of arguing either that workers' job controls simply prevented capitalists from restructuring production (Kilpatrick and Lawson, 1980) or that there was no problem in control of the labour process (Williams *et al.*, 1983). Struggles at the point of production reflected weaknesses elsewhere in the economy and also helped to reproduce and exacerbate these weaknesses, since capitalists lacked the power to rationalise the production process and workers had a defensive strength based on traditional job controls but not the organisation to press for a different kind of economic regeneration.

This argument illustrates the value of distinguishing general and detailed control. A crisis of the latter does not necessarily undermine the former. The wider point is that it is possible to analyse control without reducing it to the point of production and without oscillating between undifferentiated conceptions of it.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This chapter has tried to outline a framework for the conceptualisation and analysis of conflict in the labour process. In so doing it has related the labour process in the sense of day-to-day relations at the point of production to the capital-labour relation at a more abstract level of analysis, and has thereby tried to move beyond the negative tone prevailing in much of the labour process debate. It has argued that conflict, in the shape of a structured antagonism, is a basic feature of any exploitative mode of production and that consent, tacit skills, the negotiation of order and so forth have to be understood as shaping how this antagonism is developed and not as principles which can totally counteract it. It has also insisted on treating struggle as a central concept in exploring how workplace relations develop.

When this is done, certain problems can be dissolved. It is not surprising that capitalists do not have coherent strategies or that systems of control do not fit easily into the various ideal types that have been offered. Patterns of control develop out of struggles and

contain various demands which may well clash with each other. The capital-labour relation is inherently contradictory, and ways of managing the contradictions neither derive from nor lead to neat patterns of 'control and resistance'. It has also been stressed, however, that this argument does not lead to eclecticism or to a mere celebration of empirical complexity. Analytical tools exist for the differentiation of levels of analysis and the exploration of patterns of control and conflict. Many questions no doubt remain, in particular on the connections between the labour process and other parts of society (on which, incidentally, I do not follow Paul Thompson's objections, in this volume, to my way of distinguishing between internal and external factors). It is, for example, widely accepted that the theoretical treatment of the links between the productive system and gender relations and patriarchy requires a good deal of further work (Cockburn, 1986). But there is now the possibility of making definite advances in the theory of the labour process, and crucial to these is the treatment of conflict and struggle.

Notes

1. Calls for a dialectical approach have been made by Wardell (in this volume) and would-be critics of Burawoy (1979) such as Clawson and Fantasia (1983). Claims to have put it into action have been made by Storey (1983), Hyman (1982, 1984) and the present writer (Edwards and Scullion, 1982). What is meant by these writers plainly differs in ways which cannot be pursued here. Suffice it to say that for me an adequate dialectical approach must draw out in detail the ways in which structural factors in a given situation shaped behaviour without directly determining it; how that behaviour helped to generate expectations that influenced later developments; and how action at the point of production mediates external influences. My attempts to act on this programme are available elsewhere (Edwards, 1986: 184-204, 224-81), and I leave it to others to judge their success, and the success of other attempts. One crucial element, to which even sophisticated writers do not attend in any detail, is the significance for workplace relations of concrete activities such as output restriction, pilfering, and absenteeism. The need to integrate traditional studies of these with labour process analysis is routinely recognised but rarely followed through in detail. Recent textbooks say a great deal about managerial strategy and 'resistance', but they do not discuss the social organisation of day-to-day behaviour (for example Hill, 1981; Salaman, 1981). In other cases (notably Kiloh, 1985; Littler and Salaman, 1984) reference is made to the facts of strikes, sabotage, and so on, but attention then shifts rapidly to issues of control. How patterns of

behaviour can be related to these issues – for example, how a student is supposed to develop a sociological analysis of the nature of overt conflict – is nowhere addressed.

2. It is true that Burawoy attends to the contradictions inherent in managerial efforts to create consent. The idea of a regime may also capture something of the nature of workplace relations in the post-New-Deal United States, with the prevalence of formal bargaining contracts and tight constraints on action at the point of production (Brody, 1980). But even then informality is not removed, while in other circumstances managerial policies may be less developed and workers' ability to assert their own ideas of control may be stronger. The frontier of control is a more general concept than that of a factory regime.
3. Elsewhere (Edwards, 1986: 36–7), Braverman's approach has been dismissed for not providing useful leads in the analysis of conflict. In retrospect this dismissal could have been less brusque, for Braverman's approach as a whole has not been as thoroughly demolished as some critics claim (see Armstrong, 1986). It remains true, however, that Braverman did not deal with workers' means of exerting control in the labour process and that his argument is, at best, incomplete.
4. Armstrong's own studies (Armstrong *et al.*, 1981) illustrate the point. Workers in three factories, where managerial domination was very great, certainly had 'tacit skills' but these skills did not give them any power to challenge management. The whole point was that here, as anywhere, there was an indeterminacy of obligations, but the employers used this indeterminacy to require workers to use their tacit skills in ways suitable to them.
5. Note that this formulation avoids problems of functionalism which are commonly mentioned here. See Cohen (1978: 278–96) for an extended defence of functional arguments.
6. Thus I obviously agree with Salaman's (1986) recent call for a reorientation of analysis to consider the details of workplace conflict and accommodation, but he himself conducts such an analysis only briefly, and with no reference to this study or to others like it. I like to think that it and its successor (Edwards, 1986) carry out an appropriate analysis, in particular because it compares factories and explains why some forms of action occur in some and not others, instead of treating 'effort bargaining', 'informality' or the 'negotiation of order' as a constant.

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5 Labour and Labour Process^{*}

Mark Wardell

Labour plays a major role in production, and Harry Braverman added immeasurably to our historical appreciation and understanding of that role. In so doing he unwittingly struck a responsive chord among social scientists disenchanted with conventional approaches to the organisation of the workplace. Ironically, much of the outpouring that followed Braverman's inspirational work targeted nuances of his own argument, rather than elaborating critiques of those arguments he hoped to delegitimize.

To be sure, Braverman ignores the organised struggle of the working class and his analyses of deskilling and of Taylorism are simplified. Yet as a result of what may be seen now as a clamour to cleanse Braverman's analysis, an important asset – his recognition of the labour process as a form of praxis involving a subject–object dialectic – has been glossed over in subsequent works. Indeed, a control–resistance paradigm has captured much of the attention directed at transformations of the labour process since Braverman's work. The significance of the gains portended by the control–resistance paradigm, however, seem questionable because theorising about the labour process appear to have stalled.¹

One possible way to construct a new agenda for studying transformations of the labour process is to elaborate the basis for dialectical analyses. I begin the elaboration by assessing Braverman's two-dimensional approach, overlooked by many critics and supporters alike, and follow that elaboration with discussions of the control–resistance and dialectical paradigms. Observing the labour process within the context of the production process represents a significant theoretical contribution of a dialectical analysis. The final

^{*}I appreciate the assistance of George Crofts, Associate Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University and of the Virginia Tech Foundation. Comments by Kent Pegram, David Demo, David Knights and Ian Taplin are also greatly appreciated.

section of the chapter enumerates some implications of this contextualisation for refreshing the agenda of labour process research.

BRAVERMAN'S TWO-DIMENSIONAL APPROACH

Braverman's analysis of the labour process contains what at first glance resembles two incommensurable levels. At one level he describes the effects of the structural formation of capital on transformations of the workplace in the twentieth century. These changes, motivated in part by the drive to accumulate capital, resulted in new social and technical divisions of labour. This level of analysis appears to be a conscious choice by Braverman, a 'self-imposed limitation to the "objective" consent of class' (Braverman, 1974: 27). Nevertheless, the self-imposition did not stem the tide of criticism; in one instance it actually served as a justification to conclude that Braverman made an inexcusable error of scholarship by excluding the subjective, conscious dimension of labour activity (Elger, 1982: 24). Neither this conclusion nor Braverman's own disclaimer, in retrospect, accurately reflects the intricacies of his approach.

At a different and admittedly less developed level of analysis, Braverman betrays his self-imposed limitation by straying from the strict structural concern for objective determinants. The theoretical substructure of his work contains the recognition that production is distinctively a social process.² And at times, he reveals an awareness for how the subjective dimension of labour shapes the labour process, intimating that the transformation of the workplace involves a dialectical relation between subject and object, head and hand activities. Braverman's betrayal can be seen at three critical junctures.

First, in the introduction to *Labour and Monopoly Capital*, Braverman distinguishes the basic thrust of his approach from those which he feels have little theoretical validity, in spite of their popularity. He specifically argues against reductionist approaches. To presume, as some social scientists (including some Marxists) do, that societal development follows an 'inevitable' and an 'eternal' path reduces the diversity and colorations of social relations to scientific formulae. Marx's use of aphorisms, Braverman concedes, contributed to some of these formulae, especially those treating the means of production as technologically determinative forces. But Braverman does not accept those interpretations as valid and juxtaposes the view that

transformations within and of societies are the products of a historic process, a view reminiscent of Marx's Paris manuscripts. The means of production, he asserts, do not produce social relations; social relations produce the means of production. And, because of the complexity of capitalism as a social formation and because 'no part of . . . that formation . . . may be changed by artificial suppositions without doing violence to its true mode of existence – it is precisely because of this that *it appears to us* as "natural", "inevitable," and "external" ' (Braverman, 1974: 22; emphasis added).

At a second and more critical juncture, Braverman strays further from a structural standpoint. In the chapter entitled 'Labor and Labor Power' he builds the philosophical foundation of his subsequent analysis on the assumption that purposive work is the universal character of human labour power. The work of architects is purposive, Braverman approvingly paraphrases Marx. Many animals such as bees have the capacity to produce a surplus of certain things, but only human beings possess the potential to produce things with an intended use value. The distinctiveness of human labour power, he states, is

not its ability to produce a surplus, but rather its intelligent and purposive character, which gives it *infinite* adaptability and which produces the social and cultural conditions for enlarging its own productivity, so that its surplus product may be continuously enlarged. (Braverman, 1974: 56; emphasis added)

Human work, regardless of the context, involves the physical act of producing an object that previously existed only in the imagination of a human being. The essence of production, by this account, combines head and hand activities, which together embody the potential of human labour. Conceptualising the labour process as the combination of mental and manual efforts, Braverman relies on the ontological assumption that human labour power, in the act of production, represents one form of praxis.

Finally, Braverman betrays his self-imposition when conceptualising labour-capital relations in terms of praxis. When capitalists buy labour power, they buy an infinite '*potential*, but in its *realization* it is limited [in part] by the subjective state of the workers' (Braverman, 1974: 57; original emphasis). The formal subordination of labour did not strip away the absolute autonomy of workers; they maintained their skills, in addition to the infinite potential to create things of

of value. Nor did concentration and centralisation of the means of production surrender the skill and potential of the human worker.³

Capitalists eventually turned towards the labour process in an effort to secure greater surpluses. The arenas of production where head and hand activities were most obviously embodied – the craft and work domains of labourers – became arenas of struggle as labourers sought to maintain, and in many instances expand, their influence over production, whereas capitalists sought to limit labourers' purposive involvement. According to Braverman, capitalists deliberately tried to prise loose the subjectivity of the labour process from the physical act of production, with the intent of generating a greater proportion of surplus value in relation to the exchange value of labour:

The unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind, which capitalism threatened from its beginnings, is now attacked by a systematic dissolution employing all the resources of science and the various disciplines based on it. The subjective factor of the labour process is removed to a place among its inanimate objective factors. (Braverman, 1974: 71)

The scientific-technical revolution provided the leverage to execute this dissolution, as capitalists instituted new technologies to centralise the source of physical power over production. Moreover, a new labour force emerged – namely management and its support staff – intended as the 'sole subjective element' in the production process, but this *'ideal toward which management tends* is realized by capital only within definite limits, and [then] *unevenly* among industries' (Braverman, 1974: 171–2; emphasis added).

What limits the realisation of the ideal? Braverman's (*ibid.*: 172) answer comes as no surprise: the potential of workers to create use value. This potential limits the ideal of management in several ways. The unique embodiment of head and hand, subject and object, which was always the 'first province' of labour rather than of management, is the last province of labour too. For instance, new structures of managerial and technical co-ordination are often intended to increase productivity, but their institutionalisation opens new arenas of struggle for the creation of value. Secondly, changes deliberately instituted to erode the craft autonomy of workers have led to new skills and crafts, thereby contributing to the negation of the original

intentions to make management the sole subjective element of production.

Braverman notes a third factor which limits the realisation of management as the sole subjective element in production. Consistent with a praxis ontology, he states that the social space occupied by management and other members of the new 'labour force' also defines and contains arenas of class struggle. The organisation of managers involves a hierarchical arrangement of commodified labour; managers, accountants, engineers, supervisors and their administrative support staff sell their labour powers to capitalists.⁴ Just as production labourers do not surrender their potential to create use value, the new labour force maintains its source of 'infinite adaptability'. 'Management has become *administration, which is a labor process conducted for the purpose of control within the corporation . . .* and which contains the same antagonistic relations as are contained in the process of production itself' (Braverman, 1974: 267; original emphasis).

Braverman comes to this conclusion by way of a complex two-dimensional scheme reflected in the qualitative and quantitative levels of his analysis. The first level describes the potential of human labour, resulting from the embodiment of head and hand activity in the labour process. The province of labour provides the ultimate source of capitalist dependence on live labour, while simultaneously that province negates capitalists' interests at the points of production. The other level describes the historical transformation of production as the result of the potential of labour power to negate, and to be negated by, the recurring efforts of capitalists to convert use value into surplus value. Given this interpretation, Braverman's discussion fluctuates between 'potential' and 'reality', subjective and objective, the 'is' and the 'should be', as he concentrates on the dialectical process transforming the workplace.⁵

Curiously, critics and followers of Braverman do not entertain the possibility of two dimensions in his work. Instead they tend to view his approach as entirely devoid of the subjective, as 'exclusively from the side of the object'. The exclusion 'is no oversight; it is quite deliberate', according to Burawoy (1985: 22-3), and furthermore, Braverman 'presents capitalism as realizing its inner essence [and] *destroying all resistance*' (emphasis added). Burawoy does not acknowledge Braverman's dismissal of formulae explanations, probably because he does not accept praxis as the basic ontology of

production. Nor does he entertain the very real possibility that technologies and administrations of modern organisation, designed in a shroud of instrumental reasoning, encroach on domains where the subjectivity of labour was traditionally expressed.⁶ Burawoy's conclusion, and others like it, exaggerate Braverman's exclusion of the subjective and unfairly lay the blame for the lack of coherence and development of labour process theory at Braverman's feet. (Interestingly, most criticisms of Braverman have a Jekyll and Hyde appearance because the attacks on his work typically follow statements honouring him as the 'father' of the resurgent interest in the labour process.) Braverman must no doubt share some of the complicity for the direction in which labour process theory evolved, but what about the complicity of those who followed?

THE HEIRS TO BRAVERMAN'S LEGACY

Those who inherited Braverman's legacy stood, like Robert Frost's imaginary traveller in 'The Road Not Taken', facing two roads diverging from a common point: one leading to structural analyses, the other to dialectical analyses. Adopting the first option would mean studying the labour process as if it were arranged in accordance with a structurally endowed capacity to control production. Adopting the second option, though less well defined in Braverman's work, would mean studying the labour process within the context of the production process, as if the latter contained arenas in which class agents struggle to objectify their interests.

Option 1

Many who followed in Braverman's footsteps adopted a structural approach, and certainly numerous versions exist,⁷ but the work of Edwards (1979) and of Gordon, Edwards and Reich (1982) stand out. Collectively, this cohort of researchers seek to fill one hiatus left by Braverman. Where Braverman spends little time discussing labour protest, giving the impression that capitalists took control of the labour process from the working class without a struggle, Edwards and his colleagues focus their descriptions on the historical relation between changes in control mechanisms and workers' resistance.

Control, Edwards (1979: 17) says, reflects the capacity of capitalists to impose their will on the behaviour of workers. The structural

position of capitalists gives them the advantage in terms of the labour market; free labourers must sell their labour power for a price. But to attain a certain level of profit, capitalists must do more than buy living labour; they must also institutionalise certain controls over the labour process to attain the desired production quota and concomitant profit margin.

Initially, the scenario goes, the drive to accumulate capital led to hiring more workers, but concentration of labour alone was not sufficient to maintain a competitive market position. Capitalists next centralised their legal ownership of industries. As firm sizes grew and the number of firms in industries shrank, owners turned their attention to the labour process, the last frontier to control in pursuit of surplus value. Standardised wage systems and technological and bureaucratic controls were the mechanisms designed to increase surplus value (Gordon, Edwards and Reich, 1982). The culmination of the historical transformation of the workplace meant that craft and other forms of autonomous work gave way to centrally organised workplaces filled with workers who possessed no unique abilities; their raw physical strength and unrefined mechanical dexterity identified them as interchangeable parts in the labour process. With the gradual erosion of craft skills and the emergence of a technical-administrative class, the capacity of labourers to control their labour power was transferred to capitalists. The scenario also suggests that the current structural arrangement of the labour process prevents workers from joining in a politically conscious effort to alter the circumstances. In the end, the working class of the United States was made into an apolitical lot, mostly of unskilled labourers.

Importantly, workers periodically resisted these transformations of the labour process. As new regimes were introduced to expand production and as workers lost their capacity to control the labour process, they at least

retained their ability to resist. . . . Conflict arises over how work shall be organized, what work pace shall be established, what conditions producers must labor under, what rights workers shall enjoy and how the various employees of the enterprise shall relate to each other. (Edwards, 1979: 13; emphasis added)

After an extended period of labour resistance, 'pressures' build up to improve the controls governing the labour process and to reproduce the class relations of society, but the new controls set the stage for

another round of labour resistance. Historically, a back-and-forth sequence produced the three major periods of transformation in the United States; proletarianisation, homogenisation, and segmentation. As the sequence of stages evolved, resistance, typically in the form of strikes, became less frequent.

In this version of the control-and-resistance scenario, labourers lose control over the labour process when they lose their craft skills and the control over production. Skills enabled workers to control production and to be on a more equal footing with capitalists who depended on the individual abilities of craft workers. The current structural location of workers, shaped by technical and bureaucratic controls of capital, leaves workers with 'no say in establishing the rules' (Edwards, 1979: 22). Workers retain only an ability to resist. But what constitutes the motivational force behind labour resistance?

[Be]neath the surface the contradiction between social production and private appropriation . . . remains. The contradiction has not generated new mass-based resistance, yet already minor cracks in the edifice appear . . . and in the opening *we perceive hints of deeper structural weaknesses*. (Edwards, 1979: 152–3; emphasis added)

Alas, the ability to resist stems from the structural relations of capitalism, as workers act out a role in an evolving historical script written into the logic of capital development.

Edwards and his colleagues conclude that changes in control mechanisms have a fairly uniform and even effect on the characteristics of the labour process in most industries of the United States. Uniformity and evenness result from the hegemony of the capitalist class, which has become more prevalent than ever before.⁸ Over the long run the working class lost more than it gained, and for all practical purposes the domains where the subjectivity of labourers was once expressed have been abolished. Workers must now await the structural weakening of capitalism before they can again play a meaningful role in history. The history of transformations in the labour process appears, at least in this scenario, to have occurred in a zero-sum manner.

A key identifying feature of the control–resistance paradigm is the definition of labour power as a finite capacity to do work. To refer to *labour power as a capacity* implies a known quantity 'measured in time units (hours, days) and it may be improved or expanded by any

skills, education, or other attributes that make it more productive than “simple” labor power’ (Edwards, 1979: 11). For Braverman, however, labour power refers to an *infinite potential* to imagine various possible alternatives and to realise these with the application of practical activity.⁹ The province of the worker governs the realisation of that potential. The difference between ‘capacity’ and ‘potential’ appears to be a subtle distinction, but conceptualising labour power as a quantifiable, instead of an infinite, characteristic of workers results in a major difference in the types of explanation and conclusions that can be offered.¹⁰ Analyses using the notion of capacity too easily become one-dimensional accounts of control–resistance, where capitalists control and workers resist, and seldom, if ever, does the reverse occur.

Braverman agrees that capitalists attempted to divide the head-and-hand embodiment of production into two globally distinct acts. But in his opinion, labour still maintains the first and the last province of production, thwarting the designers of – and their intended purpose for – the division. Edwards *et al.*, on the other hand, conclude that the structural separation of conception from execution has momentarily left labour with no domain in which to express its subjectivity at the points of production. Their argument suggests that the ideal of management – to be the ‘sole subject’ of production – became a temporary reality, not that some domains simply eroded and labourers found others in which to express their subjectivity. In general the introduction of new controls effectively suppressed – and perhaps altered – the subjectivity of the working class.

Edwards and his associates advance labour process theory one significant step beyond Braverman’s analysis to the extent that they explicitly address working-class collective action in relation to changes in the control mechanisms of the workplace. Yet understanding the subject–object dialectical process of production – obviously an important item on Braverman’s research agenda – is substituted with a formula explanation of why structural contradictions change with labour process. The labour process, as the dialectical nexus of the dynamic, ongoing historical transformation of the workplace, is recast as the product of periodic confrontations between two structurally determined sets of interest-bearing actors, as if they were two warring nations meeting *en masse* on the battlefield of the shop floor. In this regard, structural analyses of control and resistance take labour process theory one step closer to a functionalist account: a step backward from the potential of Braverman’s work. To Braver-

man's credit, he maintained that labourers find new ways to exercise their influence over production, daily reproducing the struggle at the points of production.

Option 2

A dialectical approach represents the second possible avenue of inquiry contained in Braverman's legacy.¹¹ From this standpoint the production process and the labour process are two distinct processes and each involves the conception of a future objective or alternative, combined with the application of labour power. In the simplest form, human production combines the two processes into a single co-ordinated act. A person conceives of the purpose and design for a useful object and also executes practical steps to make the object, objectifying themselves in the process (Marx, 1976: 283–306).

The simplest productive act, though, occurs within the limitations of an objective context. The conceptualisation of an object to be realised represents an accumulation of 'concrete' experiences and not the product of a free-floating imagination (Berger and Luckman, 1966; Lukács, 1980). Tools and their physical structure, the conditions in which the work will be done, combined with the existing state of knowledge to guide the work, limit the possibilities and the practicalities of production. Still, in the actual combination of tools, knowledge and imagination the realised product contains a novelty not found in any of the raw means of production or in its original conception. As practical activities of labourers objectify their imaginations the outcome contradicts the ideals as initially conceived and transcends the objective circumstances in the process. The realised outcome organises the new 'reality' and new ideals are conceived, which become the guiding intentions for future practical activity. The context of production, in other words, serves as a limitation to and as a platform for producing alternatives.

Within capitalism, the co-ordination of productive acts differs fundamentally from the simplest form of production. Specifically, a dissociation of the labour process from the production process characterises the capitalist form of production. The planners of commodities or services engage in a labour process dissociated from the practical activities which materialise their plans. Likewise the manual labourers responsible for materialising the plans engage in a labour process dissociated from the planning of the commodities or services. The simple productive act has become a very complex act in

which an individual's labour process no longer coincides with the entire act of production.

The link between planning and 'assembling' consists of mediating layers of administration and technology. The layers design, coordinate and monitor the assembly process. But the more layers in the administration of production, the greater the dissociation of the labour process from the production process and the more problematic the direct influence of capitalists over the value generated at any particular point in the production process. Technological devices designed to ensure more direct controls reduce the labourers' range of physical and mental mobility without necessarily improving the efficiency of production (Marglin, 1974; Noble, 1979; Nichols and Beynon, 1977). New labour-saving technologies often require more intermediate layers of supervision, further dissociating the labour process from the production while limiting the realisation of greater surplus value by adding managerial salaries and benefits to the fixed costs of production.

Erosion of the subject from certain arenas of production occurred as the global conceptions of the production process became structurally more fragmented from the actual points of execution within it. Many outlets for labourers to express their subjectivity were reduced and some were eliminated from the production process. Yet subjective expression has been neither totally suppressed nor surrendered in the labour process itself, as workers create new ways to objectify their own purposes in production. Implicitly, the most fragmented of labourers retain a certain amount of discretion in the act of production. In other words, as the process of dissociation eroded the extent and quality of subjectivity required by labour for certain productive acts it pushed class struggle into domains of the labour process and away from specific concerns about production.¹² In that sense, the frontiers of struggle were being extended.

The United States underground coal-mining industry, for example, began as a tenant system reliant on inside contractors. Under this system miners often left the mines within four hours of starting a day's work as a means of regulating the value of coal, and hence of their labour (Goodrich, 1925; Archibald, 1922). Strikes during this era were also intended to limit production as well as to eliminate the 'order system' (payment in goods rather than money). Because the labour and production processes by and large corresponded with each other, the miners effectively controlled the industry by the number of hours they worked. By the 1940s and 1950s, specialised work teams

using mechanical loaders standardised wage systems and the eight-hour day replaced the inside contracting system. By the 1950s miners were striking over wages, job security (job bidding, job posting, seniority rights) and safety, suggesting that the commodification of labour moved the struggle to control outcomes into arenas primarily related to the labour process and that issues directly related to production became less important by comparison. This trend has been recorded for a variety of industries (Knowles, 1952: 234–5, Storey, 1980: 129, Table 6.1).

The commodification of labour that accompanied the dissociation in effect made the labour process the problematic component associated with the modern workplace and the production process is now taken for granted, just the opposite of craft production.¹³ The problematic nature of the labour process stems largely from three conflicting outcomes associated with the completion of practical tasks.

One outcome pertains to the actual accomplishment of practical tasks, a necessary requirement for commodity production. Conceiving of and drawing a design, reading blueprints and putting together an object in approximation of the design, or reading the speed of conveyors, sizes of bolts, and right from left sleeves of shirts and then judging when and how to act, contribute to the generation of surplus value for capitalists. The less variance between the ideal and the actual performance of labour, the greater objectification of the capitalists' interests.

A second set of outcomes conflicts with the first. The way in which tasks – even the most minute – are accomplished, to some extent objectifies the interests of labourers. For skilled and semi-skilled tasks, identification with the task and with co-workers, pride in one's work, together with the value of invested labour power, influence accomplishment of a task; for unskilled tasks, investing the least amount of energy may well be the primary influence on the performance of labour. Given that labourers exercise some degree of discretionary autonomy in the act of accomplishing a task, the recurring question is who will benefit more from their contributions. Put in a somewhat exaggerated form, labourers routinely choose between working for the company and working for themselves. When all is said and done, transforming the production process never improves fundamentally the efficiency and control of production because the basic capitalist dependency on the subjective input of

labour, that variable dimension in production, has not been eliminated.

A third set of conflicting outcomes for labourers pertains to political considerations for their class as a whole. Because dissociation fragments the production process, it limits the formation of a collective identity among workers. Historically, though – and no doubt most workers are aware to some extent of the history of the labour movement – issues of job security, standardised wages and judicious work rules, or more importantly regulated production, have not been resolved without a collective effort. Deciding to join a work stoppage or a go-slow forces workers to choose between immediate individual material reproduction and larger, more uncertain collective benefits (Offe and Wiesenenthal, 1980).

The value of the conflicting outcomes is created at the points of production as class agents struggle to control those outcomes. Neither profit nor 'making out' results from a capacity to control. The possession of knowledge, or any other resource, does not empower its beholder with an ability to control the realisation of specific goals (Hindess, 1982; Knights and Roberts, 1982). To view control as a capacity implies that some degree of calculable, cause-effect correspondence exists between resources possessed and the objectification of interests. In contrast, the dialectic of social practice suggests that there can be no rational means-ends correspondence in either an abstract or a practical sense. Ends are realised in the practical application of means, not the application of means as ideally conceived. Administrative decisions, union strategies and labour-capital agreements are all abstract ideals, the 'reality' of which is worked out in the struggle to control the creation of values at the points of production. To be sure, the struggle by class agents to control the creation of value never ends at the points of production.

Thus the second option embedded in Braverman's legacy defines production as social practice. Production in the most simplified form is constituted by the embodiment of head and hand activities, and only the points of production mediate the two activities. The productive act becomes more complex in capitalist forms of production as the labour process and the production process are dissociated by the mediation of layers of technology and administration. However, the embodiment of head and hand activities, the province of labour, has not been surrendered in the labour process itself, though the dissociation altered the arenas in which labourers exercise their province. By

elaborating the implications of the second option, transformations of the labour process may now be understood in terms of the dialectics of production.

THE DIALECTICS OF PRODUCTION

The control–resistance model of Edwards and his associates suggests that capitalist organisational structures control the labour process. Given the nature of the technological and bureaucratic innovations, coupled with the ubiquitous core of administrators, labourers became disenfranchised, retaining only an ability to resist. The implications of the dialectical approach indicate that serious questions must be raised about the appropriateness of the control–resistance model for understanding the relation between transformations of the labour process and workers' collective action. Of critical importance are the notions that (1) capitalists are the controllers and workers the resisters; (2) historical moments are characterised by certain structures of co-ordination which dominate the labour process of entire industries and societies; and (3) labourers today, at least in the United States, are hopelessly fragmented, awaiting pressure from the substructure of their society to force them through a structural crack and on to the stage of history.

First, the control–resistance approach presents capitalist control as unproblematic. Much like a Weberian account of organisations, this approach emphasises a coherent hierarchy consisting of coercion, or managerially consented games, as the foundation of control. In either instance control presumably flows from the top of the hierarchy down to the labourers at the points of production, implying that a rational (calculable) managerial approach governs both production and labour processes (Edwards, 1979: 33, 130–2).

For such a unity of rational dominance to exist, the different sectors of rule-makers and enforcers must hold similar views about what is to be done. The views of each sector, though, are constructed within a labour process dissociated from the points of production and from the other sectors. This dissociation encourages beliefs within each sector that its rational discourse and its particular solutions to problems of productivity are the most valid. Moreover, administrative sectors compete for the scarce opportunities and resources which allow them to institute their plans (Armstrong, 1985). Regardless of

who officially wins, battles among and between administrative staff do not end with the adoption of the most 'efficient' plan, although that may well have been the original objective. Nor do the battles necessarily end at all: the losers may well find ways to discredit the victors and to avoid failure in the next round. Administrative discourses for handling productivity problems, then, are not rationally conceived; most reflect ideological appeals to the same authority – the discourse of science.

Engineers, managers and accountants tend to 'regard all that is *real* as *necessary*' (Braverman, 1974: 16; original emphasis) because they translate all human activity into a one-dimensional logic. The discourse of management accountants typifies this logic. Management accounting in the United States is defined as:

the process of identification, measurement, accumulation, analysis, preparation, interpretation, and communication of financial information used by management to plan, evaluate and control within an organization and to assure appropriate use and accountability for its resources. (National Association of Accountants, 1981: 4).

The central thrust to management accounting is the establishment of control mechanisms designed to reduce the variance between actual and budgeted costs in order to approximate the predicted level of profit. Clearly, management accounting typifies the top-to-bottom form of rational control which, Edwards says, atomises labourers.

To the extent that the social nature of labour is taken into account in performance reports, accountants presume that labourers can be socialised to improve production – the function of evaluation – with the use of incentives and disincentives. Accountants do not recognise (nor does Edwards) that in constructing performance norms for units of labour power (individuals, shifts or sections) they actually construct potential arenas of struggle. The enforcement of performance norms structures the labour process, producing an objective reality to and within which labourers organise their responses. In the end, their activity challenges management's right to manage (Storey, 1980), and in particular accountants' predictions of productivity. In the meantime, the failed strategy of the accountants sets the stage for renewed competition among the administrative sectors. Administrative competition, from this standpoint, stems largely from labour's negation of the various administrative claims to validity.

Important motivating forces for transformations of the labour process originate, therefore, at the points of production, in the dialectical relation between the province of labour and the co-ordinating structures of the labour process. The variances between expected and realised outcomes are symptoms of the dialectics of production, the impetuses for change which move up the hierarchy of an organisation, disrupting the mediating layers and circuits of control (Storey, 1985). Theoretically speaking, the dialectics of production negate all attempts rationally to structure the production of labour processes and thus negate the presumption that a uniform control strategy or structure dominates a single organisation. In a more practical sense, the dialectics of production encourage the short-sightedness and *ad hoc* approach to problem-solving often exhibited by management. Beginning analyses of the labour process with the dialectics of production acknowledges the domains, potential and amount of influence workers collectively have over the creation of value and reveals the irreconcilability of issues, such as organisation–disorganisation or centralisation–decentralisation, grounded in the notion that organisations are rationally controlled entities.

Another limitation of structural analyses is reflected in the tendency to dissect history into relatively distinct and uniform periods in which the dominance of the capitalist class tends to be hegemonic. For instance, Gordon *et al.* (1982) maintain that standardised wage systems proletarianised the craft workers between 1820 and 1890, mass-batch technologies homogenised them between 1870 and 1940, and bureaucratic controls atomised them between 1920 and 1980. This ‘view of history and other foolish attempts to master history by means of violent simplifications [of determinacy ignore] the thread-by-thread weaving of the fabric of history’. Formulae accounts confuse the essence, or logical thrust, of capitalists’ ideals within the actual historical transformations of the labour process because they ignore the active involvement of labour.

The ‘effects of’ structures of co-ordination within the same historical moment will not be uniformly similar from region to region or industry to industry because labourers are called upon to complete the productive act. The expropriation of surplus value remains the focus of capitalists’ ideals, but the implementation and relative successes of those ideals occur within the struggle to control outcomes, and vary unevenly (Special Issue Editorial Collective, 1978). Certainly, labourers seldom coalesce beyond the boundaries of a

firm, and then hardly ever in a co-ordinated industry-wide effort, suggesting that the province of labour contributes to an uneven development of the workplace and to the fragmentation of labour.¹⁴ The dialectical relations between individuals and groups, units and shifts, localities and regions, sexes as well as races, add to the thread-by-thread weaving of history in an uneven pattern.

If the dialectics of production contribute to uneven historical moments, claims that historical moments converge on each other, as if the transformation of the labour process were a linear evolution, also become difficult to support. Nevertheless, analyses of the control-resistance relation often describe periods in a sequential manner with the prior ones being sufficient, if not necessary, conditions for subsequent ones. Edwards and his colleagues illustrate this linearity when they claim that centralisation of capital was a necessary prerequisite for proletarianisation and homogenisation, structural prerequisites for the mobilisation of worker resistance to the new regimes of capital. As support for the centralisation thesis, Edwards (1979: 56) cites the United States anthracite industry and the origination of the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). The UMWA resulted from the miners being 'impelled toward more broadly organized struggle . . . by their employers' successful push toward homogenization of the production process near the end of the nineteenth century' (Gordon, Edwards and Reich, 1982: 157-8).

However, research on the anthracite industry suggests that the propensity of miners to organise for the control of production, and their successes at organising, preceded the centralisation of the industry by at least thirty years. Owners of the mines and railroads were forced legally to pool their capital as a last line of defence against the aggressiveness of the miners (Wardell and Johnston, 1987). The underground labour process did not change significantly until attempts to dissociate the labour and production processes began in earnest during the 1920s and 1930s, long after the major industry-wide strikes and the coalescence of miners' interests into organisational form in the 1860s and 1870s. The introduction of the mechanical loader illustrates this point: the loader contributed significantly to the standardisation of hourly wages, yet it was not used heavily until the late 1940s (Dix, 1979).

Finally, the abstracted view of workers' struggle and their collective action is another limitation of the control-resistance model. The scenario of labour resistance described by Edwards and his colleagues portrays labour as passively involved in organising the workplace

except for periodic acts played in accord with a historical script known only to the observers (Castoriadis, 1976–7). Workers' struggle, however, may be more recurrent than Edwards *et al.* allow, but because it is played out in a variety of ways, struggle goes undetected if it does not appear in the form of strikes. Most workers recognise the costs of strike activity and rely on other means at the points of production routinely to produce added value for their labour power.

A study of underground coal-miners indicates that miners feel the safety of the underground workplace falls within their domain (Wardell, Vaught and Smith, 1985). From the miners' vantage point, neither management's knowledge nor special training sessions facilitate a secure face; only miners know the dangers and how to educate each other about those dangers. Miners routinely resist management encroachments into the domain of safety and complain that the ignorance of supervisors and management, along with the latter's stinginess, often means certain requisite materials for a safe face are not available.

Also miners, like most workers, deliberately engage in various forms of collective action while at work. Some events might be labelled as horseplay or games, but they are intended to build solidarity and collective consciousness among workers. Certain games, for instance, are played on fellow-miners, often involving explicit sexual activity intended to 'reveal' a person to his/her workmates (Vaught and Smith, 1980). Other games are directed at management, such as refusing to ride or use company equipment not meeting federal standards. On occasion miners play games with production, exceeding or grossly undercutting quota as ways to teach management lessons. The horseplay and games are ways for miners to reincorporate the head and hand activities of production into a corporal unity. In other words, they are political acts whereby miners collectively dissent from the formal regulations of the administration without suffering the economic losses accrued during strikes. To a degree labourers' opportunities to express subjectivity and to increase the value of their efforts are limited more to the labour process since its dissociation from the production process. Yet the labour process remains a social practice, and as a result the struggle over the creation of values remains a daily event.

CONCLUSION

Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has been the target of numerous attacks, some rather virulent. Many of the critics see his analysis as a rejection of the subjective content of class struggle, and his announced self-imposition lends a certain credence to that conclusion. Braverman's work none the less remains more provocative and instructive than most critics allow. In contrast to the standard view, I have argued that he betrayed his own self-imposition and smuggled the subjective back into his analysis of the labour process. Specifically, Braverman appears to work from an implicit two-dimensional approach.

Much like Marx, Braverman began his analysis with a philosophical anthropology which stipulates that production is a form of praxis. Also like Marx, he builds a descriptive analysis on top of that philosophy. He focused systematically on the contradictory unity of the mental and manual, subject and object dimensions of production. From his analysis, the beginnings of a dialectical approach may be gleaned and elaborated into a viable method for analysing transformations of the labour process. A dialectical approach directs attention to the dissociation of the labour process from the production process, as structures of co-ordination were historically produced to disengage the global conceptions of production – such as design, quality and quantity – from the practical execution of those conceptions. But the province of labourers – their subjective involvement at points in the production process – remains their source of discretionary autonomy and ultimately the source of the capitalists' dependency on labour. Struggle did not result in the elimination of subjectivity either from labour or from the labour process, and it endures as a major source of the negation of capitalists' interests.

When pursuing the relation between transformation of the labour process and working-class collective action, few discussants follow the dialectical path implied in Braverman's work. Too often the heirs of his legacy present abstracted descriptions of the relation between control and resistance. This route now appears fraught with innumerable theoretical culs-de-sac. The portrayals of corporate structures as uniform empires, where the dominance of capitalists converges on the points of production and leaves labourers fragmented and quiescent, represents the formulae explanations Braverman disdained and warned against. When Richard Edwards thinks he sees 'cracks in the edifice' of capitalism and expects the ferment of the

working class to push through those cracks, like lava spewing from a volcano, he conflates the essence of capitalism with its historical reality and reifies the transformations of the labour process.

Braverman's work, of course, contains faults, and many criticisms are apropos. Although he found fault with Marx's frequent use of aphorisms, for example, perhaps Braverman's own use of them contributes to many criticisms directed at his work, as well as to a tacit support for the control-resistance model. Perhaps too his use of aphorisms reveals the political content of the qualitative dimension in his analysis, a lamentation for the passing of the traditional craft worker and the coming of the technocrat. From this perspective Braverman's romanticism was not a major flaw in his work. His two-dimensional approach points in the direction of an analysis of the labour process, where technocrats represent the implementation of a one-dimensional logic which threatens – but, it is to be hoped cannot suppress – the province of labour. To that extent, his approach leads to analyses which potentially provide the basis of a theoretically informed praxis. Meanwhile, the struggle to control outcomes continues at the points of production.

Notes

1. The current lack of any general theory in the area of the labour process has not gone unnoticed or without attempts to make midcourse corrections. Storey (1985) cites Edwards (1979) and Burawoy (1979) as major contributors to the problems in post-Braverman labour process literature, and maintains that neither an abandonment of labour process theory nor an affirmation to 'cleanse' the field will suffice. Instead, a 'radical revision' would appear to be the only viable way to stave off what otherwise is a certain crisis on the horizon.
2. Burawoy (1985: 20, note 13) recognises a similar set of conflicting themes in Braverman's work. Braverman, he says, views the working class as makers of history in the early stages of capital development and as the victims of that history in its latter stages. This view of the history of the working class first as creators and then as victims, as well as the more general themes of subjectivity and objectivity, reflect what some Marxists see as two incommensurable problematics in Marx's work and in Marxian theory (Althusser, 1969). Other Marxists see these themes as two dimensions of the same problematic (Lefebvre, 1968). Lukács, Korsch and Marcuse have similar themes in their works, suggesting that Braverman may well be following an established tradition within Marxist literature – a tradition which differs significantly from the more orthodox structural position of Stalin, Bukharin and, more recently, Al-

thusser. Evaluating the sensibility of either tradition takes us beyond the scope of the present discussion. (See Castoriadis [1976–7] for one evaluation of these issues.) Still, the subjective dimension of social practice remains underdeveloped in the Marxist tradition which Braverman follows. Little progress has been made in elaborating the subjective for analysis either of organisations or of the labour process. See Clawson (1980) and Stark (1980) for notable efforts in advancing the notion of the subject. See also Knights and Willmott, both in this volume.

3. Braverman relies on Marx's (1976) argument that the skill of craft labour does not become a target of job redesign until capitalists move towards establishing a real subordination of labour, when the relative surplus value of each individual labourer becomes the focus of evaluation.
4. Armstrong (1983) and Storey (1985), though critical of Braverman in certain ways, develop this idea in more elaborate form.
5. This argument does not negate the validity of certain claims made against his work. See, for example, Stark (1980), who presents a dialectical view of the labour process based on specific criticisms of Braverman's work.
6. Braverman's observation about the encroachment of bureaucratic organisations into the subjective realm has been supported by a variety of organisational theorists, Weber being one. Yet Burawoy seems bothered more by this than by many other aspects of Braverman's work because he tends to view Braverman's overall thesis as representing a neo-Luddite standpoint.
7. For example, see Zimbalist (1979), Carchedi (1977), Burawoy (1979) and Aglietta (1979). Clawson and Fantasia (1983) critically review Burawoy's book as placing the accumulation process ahead of dialectics in understanding transformations of the labour process. See Gartman (1983) for a similar conclusion regarding the works of Burawoy as well as Aglietta, but from a different approach to dialectics from that represented here or by Clawson and Fantasia.
8. Edwards and his associates explicitly circumvent the importance of considering uneven development (Gordon, Edwards and Reich, 1982: 20–3).
9. Edwards adopts his terminology from Marx's (1976: 279–80) discussion of the sale and purchase of labour power. Marx talks about labour capacity and labour power almost interchangeably in this section, but in the next chapter, 'The Labour Process and the Valorization Process', he discusses labour power as a potential. Including both capacity and potential into the analysis of the labour process, therefore, would be more in keeping with the two-dimensional approach of Marx and Braverman than Edwards's concentration on capacity alone.
10. I credit Bingham Pope with helping me to see the importance of this distinction.
11. For further discussion of dialectical analysis generally, or its application to organisational research specifically, see Lefebvre (1968), Allen (1975), Benson (1977), Wardell and Benson (1979) and Storey (1985).
12. This is the reason for Braverman's sombre query about the effects of capitalist forms of production and their threat to the province of labour. Braverman, a romantic of sorts, worried that even if the humanity of the

human race could possibly withstand the assault being engineered against it, the restricted domains of objectification would leave it impoverished. Hence his second dimension of analysis routinely figures in his work.

13. For a contrasting argument see Burawoy (1979: 24–9), who maintains that the content of labourers' consciousness remains focused on the production of useful things and not on the wage–labour exchange.
14. Of course other factors limit the formation of working-class organisations, such as state regulations, modes of possession and the structures of unions (Offe and Wiesenthal, 1980).

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6 Managerial Strategies, Activities, Techniques and Technology: Towards a Complex Theory of the Labour Process

Andrew Friedman

1 INTRODUCTION

How can managerial strategies be measured both over time and, particularly, across different organisations? In *Industry and Labour* (1977) I suggested that two types of strategies, Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control, could be used to guide the analysis of management behaviour in the labour process. A key proposition was that managers were pushed to change their strategies in response to changing market conditions and changing forms and strength of worker resistance in ways which could be predicted, with appropriate qualifications. This proposition was tested by examining a number of case studies over a long period of time and by picking out major changes in market conditions, worker resistance and managerial strategies. Dealing with gross empirical phenomena (the only kind generally available to historical studies) allowed a rather simple theoretical framework to be employed. In order to deal with more detailed data, a more complex theoretical framework is needed. In this chapter I attempt to develop such a framework.

It will be clear to readers that this chapter represents an extension of the original framework, not a repudiation. In the next section I discuss (answer?) certain criticisms of the management-strategies framework. In section 3 I look at management activities and subdivide the gross types of strategies into strategic dimensions to allow measurement across different organisations. Section 4 deals with techniques and technology (in a preliminary fashion). In section 5

dynamic properties of the model are explored, and the chapter concludes with a summary of the interrelations among the elements of the expanded framework.

2 MANAGERIAL STRATEGIES

When managers buy workers' capacity to work (labour power), they buy a peculiar sort of commodity. Labour capacity is peculiar for two reasons: first, workers are particularly malleable; you can get somebody, once employed, to do something beyond what may have been specified in the original employment contract. Second, workers are ultimately controlled by an independent and often hostile will. These two peculiarities of labour capacity occasion two types of strategies which top managers pursue for maintaining authority over workers. In the first type of strategy – what I call the Responsible Autonomy type – managers try to accentuate the positive peculiar aspect of labour capacity, its malleability. Workers are given responsibility, status, light supervision, and their loyalty towards the firm is solicited by encouraging venom against competitors, by fancy sports facilities, by co-opting trade union leaders, and so on. In the second type of strategy – what I call the Direct Control type – top managers try to reduce each individual worker's amount of responsibility by close supervision and by setting out in advance and in great detail the specific tasks individual workers are to do.

Both types of managerial strategy have serious contradictions. These stem from their common aim: to maintain and extend managerial authority over people who are essentially free and independent, but who have alienated (sold) their labour capacity. Ultimately, the Direct Control type of strategy treats workers as though they were machines, assuming that they can be forced, by financial circumstances or close supervision, to relinquish control over what they do for most of their waking hours. Ultimately, the Responsible Autonomy type treats workers as though they were not alienated from their labour capacity by trying to convince them that the aims of top managers are their own. The contradictions are that people *do* have independent and often hostile wills which cannot be destroyed, and the ultimate aim of top managers is to make steady and high profits, rather than to tend to their workers' needs.

Management is an active process. To maintain stable and high profits requires continual reorganisation of systems of co-ordination

and lines of authority in response to changes required by fresh worker resistance, new technologies, and other types of competitive challenge. But once any type of managerial strategy is implemented, it cannot be changed radically within a short period of time. Direct Control strategies require well-defined lines of authority and a high proportion of white-collar staff. Responsible Autonomy strategies may require an elaborate ideological structure for co-opting workers' leaders and the rank and file themselves, as well as relative employment security. To switch suddenly from a strong Responsible Autonomy strategy to a Direct Control strategy, or the other way round, would cause severe disruptions.

Besides the difficulty of changing strategies quickly, each type of managerial strategy appears to generate its own peculiar form of inflexibility. With a high degree of Direct Control managers will find it relatively difficult to move workers around factories or to change their methods in response to machine faults, mistakes in co-ordination, changing techniques or changing product demand. Each change will require complex and time-consuming planning, communication and implementation of new detailed work tasks. With a high degree of Responsible Autonomy top managers will find it difficult to fire workers or to replace workers' skills and impose Direct Control with new machinery, without undermining the ideological structure upon which Responsible Autonomy is founded.

To say that a high *degee* of either Responsible Autonomy or Direct Control generates high inflexibility of a form peculiar to each strategy is to conceive of these strategies as two directions towards which managers can move, rather than two pre-defined states between which managers choose. There is therefore a wide range of possible positions between extreme forms of Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control, as well as different paths leading in each direction. This is the way they were conceived in *Industry and Labour* (1977: 107), and the point has been reiterated since (Friedman, 1984: 181), though some have ignored this point and criticised the framework for its absence (Nichols, 1980: 276; Thompson, 1983: 143).

2.1 Why begin with 'managerial' strategies?

The core of the analysis, managerial strategies, reflects the belief that the primary dynamic influence on the organisation of work is normally exerted through the initiatives of managers. Workers will also influence work organisation, sometimes by forcing managers to

alter their tactics or strategies and sometimes directly, particularly through informal practices. Nevertheless, the fundamental structure of property rights in capitalist societies (and indeed in any class-divided society) means that those with a primary claim of possession of the means of production will *normally* take the primary initiatives in the organisation of productive activity.

2.2 Why begin with managerial 'strategies'?

Strategies were chosen instead of structural factors such as market or technological conditions. While there is obviously a symbiotic relation between strategy and structure (see Chandler, 1962, for example), a fundamental emphasis on strategy will, I believe, lead us less into the temptation of situational determinism (see Latsis, 1972). A fundamental problem with most economic analysis, neoclassical and Marxist alike, as well as much sociological analysis, is that the desire to come up with unambiguous analyses and predictions leads to the use of observable and relatively stable structures to predict the outcomes of human interaction. Peculiarly individual characteristics of human actors are either ignored or treated as 'disturbances', preferably random. Environmental factors clearly influence human actions, often in ways which can be predicted with some degree of confidence. Nevertheless, whether any particular person will be influenced sufficiently to act in the predicted manner will depend on individual systematic features which must not be summarily dealt with as random influences.

Strategies were chosen first because what managers will do in reaction to any environmental situation cannot be predicted simply from a reading of structural features. Second, more than one strategy was proposed to emphasise that there is no 'One Best Way' to manage workers from *managers'* perspective. The choices are real. Sometimes one strategy will be appropriate, sometimes another. Which strategy ought to be used, and the degree to which it is pursued, is not a simple matter because a range of choices is available at any time. A key value of the management-strategies approach is that it allows for management error. Strategies are about intentions which need not be coherent, conscious, constant or successful. Changing market conditions, technological possibilities or the heat of shop-floor struggle may push managers to change their strategies. However, whether they move at all in the predicted direction, whether they move quickly or slowly, and whether such changes

allow them to secure higher profits or to avoid substantial losses will depend crucially on options chosen in the past. Because of this strong interdependence across time, decisions to change overall managerial strategies towards workers may be viewed as long-run decisions. Finally, strategies were chosen in order to capture this *long-run* and *general* nature of certain management decisions. Of course there are a huge number of decisions which managers take concerning work organisation and workers. Nevertheless some decisions are more fundamental than others – first, because they have more long-term consequences in that they are harder to change and involve heavy cost commitments, and second, because they have a wide or general effect on many different activities which managers influence.

2.3 Why concentrate on strategies concerning the maintenance of authority over ‘labour’?

We could have begun with strategies towards product markets or technology. None the less, the main object of the framework is to explain the organisation of work and industrial relations. As will become clear when discussing the relations among market factors, technology and the strategies (section 5), these influences have not been ignored, though admittedly, the key place has been accorded to strategies in relation to labour.

One criticism of the whole of labour process literature is that it appears to elevate labour control issues as the central problem of capitalist management, as opposed to the true aim of achieving high profits. Wood and Kelly (1982) note that Marx emphasised three elements that enable management to achieve high profits: control over the labour process, maximising the rate of surplus-value extraction, and realising surplus value. Contradictions can arise in any of these three ‘moments’ of the process.¹

Certainly at times management will be primarily concerned with issues other than maintaining authority over workers. Furthermore, initiatives in these other spheres will sometimes have important consequences for the organisation of work and industrial relations. Nevertheless, strategies towards markets or technology will often be constrained by labour policies. Also, the consequences of strategies towards markets or technology on work issues will be mediated by existing labour strategies (and of course the interaction of these strategies with worker resistance).

I would agree with Wood and Kelly that certain labour process writers have confused labour-control strategies with the ultimate aims of managers. Braverman (1974), Marglin (1974), Brighton Labour Process Group (1977) and Edwards (1979) are, I believe, particularly prone to this. I have criticised writers on deskilling for mistaking a *strategy* towards deskilling with the *goals* of managers (Friedman, 1981).

2.4 Managerial consciousness and rationality

What the managerial strategies framework does *not* imply is either that managers always hold a coherent and conscious set of policy relations *or* that such policies are effectively followed through from strategic thinking to implementation. According to Rose and Jones (1984), anything which is claimed to be a managerial strategy should have these two characteristics (rationality or coherence and effective implementation). I would agree with Child (1985) that these requirements are far too stringent for the concept of strategies to be useful. Certainly the degree of coherence and consciousness by which managers perceive strategies and the problems top managers may have in getting their strategies implemented, particularly if middle managers are pursuing different strategies, are important issues which ought not to be assumed away. However, the way to deal with them is *not* to throw away the advantages of the strategic framework (such as the clear insistence on choice and a degree of consciousness effecting the outcomes of the complex labour process) just because the medium through which they are expressed is muddled with other considerations.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, strategy originally simply meant the office or command of a general or generalship, and one of its meanings now is simply the art of projecting and directing the larger military movements and operations of a campaign. Strategy is distinguished from tactic, which is the mechanical movement of bodies set in motion by strategy. There is nothing in the definition to suggest that strategy can be thought of only as a coherent, rational and consistent activity. It would be a pity if we could not analyse a general's behaviour as guided by a strategy simply because the general occasionally lost sight of his own strategies or because some of his lieutenants were incompetent or had ideas of their own. It is also unduly restrictive to disallow inference of a strategy from an examination of the general's actions without a copy of his memoirs.

This is not to imply that the general's consciousness does not matter; merely that describing the general's initiatives in terms of an overall strategy is useful quite independent of the general's degree of consciousness of his strategy. Similarly, the problems of implementation – or what Child (1985) calls the tightness of coupling – between managerial intentions and their actual implementation should be treated as a variable factor, but one which does not destroy the utility of modelling those intentions in the first place.

The link between managerial strategies and managerial consciousness can be described in another way. While managers may not have overall strategies in mind when they make particular choices as to how to organise the labour process, at certain times the consequences of their choices will become more obvious through the basic contradictions of each strategy. Each type of strategy has its own characteristic consequences on industrial relations. For example, the Task Organisation aspects of Direct Control strategies encourage boredom, reduced worker effort, labour turnover, and possibly more overt forms of collective worker resistance. Responsible Autonomy strategies encourage demands from workers for further concessions and make it difficult to fire individual workers. In time, as the pattern of industrial relations is shaped by internally and externally generated stimuli, the particular strategic position on this RA/DC dimension implied by organisation-structure choices will stimulate an awareness on the part of managers of the RA/DC consequences of their choices, even if the choices were not made with overall strategies towards labour in mind.

2.5 Managerial strategies and managerial success

There is a further concept which is *not* implied by the managerial-strategies concept. To follow a strategy does not imply *success*. Not only may strategies attributable to top managers not be implemented as planned, but also the outcome may not be as managers intended. The primary goals of top managers, steady and high profits, are not the same as the strategies. Even if top managers 'succeed' in the sense of implementation of strategies or tactics, those initiatives may provoke reactions from workers (or from suppliers and customers) which raise costs or reduce sales. Also, strategic moves may be implemented only partially because top managers may not realise the need to alter as wide a range of tactics as may be necessary to make the change in strategy effective. The strategic framework proposed

here differs fundamentally from the framework proposed by many management theorists in that it is not prescriptive in the simple sense of proposing that one strategy will always be 'better' or more successful than another. Theorists who propose Direct Control strategies often suggest that theirs is the only *real* management strategy, because theirs is the strategy which directly controls the labour process. Taylor was merely the best-known of this sort of theorist. The Responsible Autonomy theorists generally recognise Direct Control strategies as management strategies, but either consider them to be incomplete because they do not take the human element into consideration (Mintzberg, 1973) or believe them to be mistaken, or very rarely appropriate (McGregor, 1960).

2.6 Managerial strategies and management philosophies or value systems

A further general qualification to the managerial-strategies concept proposed here is that I have chosen not to call them philosophies, ideologies, value systems or styles. Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control have been defined at a very general level. Variants such as Taylorism or Theory Y or the human-relations perspective may be viewed as philosophies in that they are the product of the writings of academics or 'philosophers'. It is likely that practising managers will be familiar with these philosophies. They may, for a time, be strongly committed to one of them. But it is part of the framework to propose that attitudes towards workers will be shaped in generally predictable ways, in response to the hurly-burly of actual management practice within the particular labour process they are managing, as well as by outside ideological influences. The tenets of either strategy will be continually used by managers to further their goals and to justify their actions to themselves, their lower-level managers *and* their workers. Nevertheless, top managers will jettison such philosophies or values if they appear to get in the way of their goals. At least, we propose that they will often be forced to change strategies. Those managers who do not change, we predict, will be less likely to survive.² The one long-run evaluative statement that we would endorse is that adaptability (the ability to change or adapt strategies in the face of changing environmental and internal dynamics) is a long-run characteristic of successful management groups. This is particularly important for private labour processes in capitalist

economies because they are more subject to changing environmental (market) conditions.

Thorstein Veblen (1904) suggested that those involved in what he called the machine process (engineers, technicians, both workers and direct managers) think more pragmatically, in terms of cause and effect. Those separated from it (Veblen was thinking of accountants, lawyers and financiers) think more in terms of precedents, morality and values. Similarly, we might think of distance from the labour process as a dimension which is correlated with a tendency to treat management practice in philosophical and static terms, rather than in pragmatic, strategic and dynamic terms.

Burawoy (1979) and others have emphasised the production and reproduction of workers' attitudes and consciousness within the labour process, and the relative autonomy of this process from external influences. Managers' attitudes are also influenced by their direct experiences in the labour process. These experiences may be at variance with values acquired outside that process. Managers who have been brought up to treat their fellows as themselves, but who often must treat others as commodities within the labour process, will begin to acquire the ideological justifications appropriate to Direct Control strategies. On the other hand, managers brought up to think that workers are irresponsible and irrational (probably from reading British newspapers) but who often rely on workers' goodwill and skill, will begin at least to believe that 'they cannot all be bad'.

2.7 In defence of a simple dichotomy

Perhaps the most common criticism of the Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control framework is the charge that it is a simple dichotomy (Nichols, 1980: 276; Littler, 1982: 3; Thompson, 1983: 143). There are two ways of interpreting this criticism. Either the problem is that managerial strategies need to be explicitly theorised on several different levels (levels of detail and levels of organisation – the firm, the industry, the state), or the problem is that the two strategies are insufficient. I fully accept the first type of criticism (see sections 3–5 below). Concerning the second type of criticism – only two strategies – I am unrepentant.

The two strategies represent what I believe to be the fundamental contradiction of the labour process in a class-divided society. There is always a fundamental tension between the need to gain co-operation or consent from those who do the work, and the need to force them

to do things they do not wish to do, or to be treated in a way which is against their own interests, in order that the goals of those 'in control' of the labour process be achieved.³ This contradiction is fundamental to all class-divided societies. It may be expressed in general terms as a tension between treating people as one would treat oneself (a desirable basic tenet of non-class-divided societies, but often a strategic device in a class-divided society) and treating people as the 'other' – meaning other than oneself, perhaps other than human. In those terms it is difficult to imagine (at least it is difficult for me to imagine) a number greater than two which makes sense, though we could further define 'other' into others. What I believe distinguishes each mode of production is the characteristic conceptualisation of the 'other'. The 'other' associated with the capitalist mode of production is the commodification of labour, the treatment of people as no different from things, from other inputs into the labour process. In capitalist society as a whole there are different models of the 'other', such as other than male, other than white or other than British. These can sometimes be used as strategic models in the labour process. In societies preceding the existence of well-developed labour (power) markets, different notions of other were more important as overall strategies to co-ordinate the treatment of the lower classes in the labour process.

Littler has actually alluded to this fundamental dichotomy of the capitalist labour process:

The labour/labour power distinction implies that capitalism is in a perpetual tension between treating labour as a commodity and treating it as a non-commodity, that is as a continuing social relation between employer and workers. (Littler, 1982: 32)

This is one way of expressing the Direct Control versus Responsible Autonomy dichotomy which Littler (*ibid.*: 3) explicitly suggests should be rejected because it is 'simple'.

3 MANAGEMENT ACTIVITIES AND STRATEGIC DIMENSIONS

Management of a capitalist labour process requires initiatives concerning many different activities. Different labour processes require different tasks. For example, some require handling volatile chem-

icals. Controlling the physical environment becomes a major activity which is unnecessary for most other labour processes. Nevertheless we can distinguish, at a fairly general level, categories of activities which are required in all labour processes. The following four will be distinguished: Task Organisation, Control Structure, Labour-Market Relations and Lateral Relations. This list is not intended to be exhaustive. There are other activity categories which we could examine, such as Supplier Relations or Physical Environment Design. The choice of categories is guided by my interest in work organisation and industrial relations. The categories chosen are managerial activities through which the strategies towards maintaining authority are most easily articulated.

The relation between strategies and activities is complex. Three different linking concepts are necessary. First is the concept of managerial energy, attention or effort. In the long run, management must deal with an extremely large number of tasks. Many are dealt with in a routine and perfunctory manner in any short period of time, because they do not 'slip'. For example, the physical plant is rented. At that time considerable effort may have gone into assessing and carrying out repairs, renovation and redesign. Once carried out, much of this aspect of managerial work can be ignored at little cost. Also, at the time of plant renovation, clear and routine maintenance procedures may be established. These may be sufficient to allow higher-level managers to ignore this category of activities. Other activities require more frequent attention. The structure of control, for example, is more likely to be affected adversely by external conditions, such as changes in labour legislation or changes in the particular stock of workers to be controlled. Also the structure of control is more likely to generate problems for management (lowering worker effort or generating more active resistance) as part of its normal operation because it relates more closely to the basic dynamic and contradictory aspects of the labour process. Therefore deterioration of the control structure, in the sense of aspects of the control structure lowering profits, is more likely in the short run. This, in turn, pushes management to expend more effort on these activities within any particular period of time.

The sorts of managerial activity which are characterised by rapid deterioration and high managerial attention are those which are more likely to express the most recent strategic position of top managers on the Direct Control/Responsible Autonomy continuum (contingent on two further conditions, discussed below). Which activities these are

will differ in different organisations and over time, though some activities will generally be more prone to deterioration – those closely connected to markets or those closely connected to the fundamental problem of control.

A second consideration for linking activities with strategies relates to the general, extra-organisation level. At different times the activities which achieve more managerial attention will be influenced by managerial fashion, union activity at a national level or wider political debates. Employee participation schemes and health and safety conditions (particularly associated with dangerous substances such as asbestos) are examples of themes which descend from a wider societal context to stimulate managerial effort towards particular activities. The role of the state is particularly important here.

Finally some management activities are, by their nature, closely associated with work organisation and industrial relations. Control structure and labour-market relations are, *ceteris paribus*, the two most closely associated categories of activities.

Activities are simply the tasks of management. They are the plane or field on which strategic initiatives, resistance and counter-moves are played out (or fought).⁴ Within each category of activities there is a wide range of choices as to how to carry out each individual activity. These choices will be influenced by top management's basic strategy towards labour. However, this does not mean that we can determine which strategy is being pursued by looking at the particular choice made in any one of these activities. The range of choices for designing each activity can at best be treated only as an *imperfect* microcosm of the range of choices for designing the entire set of activities. This is because each activity will have only a variable ability to reflect the current Responsible Autonomy/Direct Control strategic position due to different degrees of managerial effort expended on each activity, the influence of extra-organisation fashion and techniques, and the degree to which the activity is associated with overall work organisation and industrial relations.

This leaves us with a formidable problem. Even if we can decide how to value each possible choice on the design of any one activity according to its position on a Responsible Autonomy/Direct Control continuum, how can we further decide on the relative importance or weighting of the score on that activity for an overall adjudication of strategic position? The answer is, I believe, to consider certain dimensions of Responsible Autonomy/Direct Control which are peculiar to categories of activities. Categories of activities and their strategic dimensions are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1 Managerial Strategies and Activities

Categories of Activities	Task Organisation	Control Structure	Lateral Relations	Labour-Market Relations
Subcategories of Activities	Types and form of inputs Method of transformation Scheduling and organisation Tools and machinery available	<i>Layers of control</i> - Instruction and direction - Monitor - Evaluate and reward (punish)	Structuring communications among workers at levels of: Small groups Between departments of similar function Departments of different functions With customers and suppliers	Charting the individual's progress through the firm: Recruitment Training Promotion Separation
Strategic Dimensions	Task length Task variety Task originality	Degree of detail Degree of formality Monitor - people or work Evaluate by reward v. punish	Degree of communication Human v. non-human forms Co-operative v. competitive relations	Dependency on particular staff Employment protection of individuals

3.1 Task Organisation

Distinguishing *categories* of activities from activities is rather arbitrary. There is a range or continuum of ways of describing activities from the most general and wide to the most specific and narrow. Broadly, a number of sub-categories relating to Task Organisation may be distinguished which apply to a wide range of labour processes.

First, types of raw materials used and the form in which work requests are received; second, the methods of production used in terms of working procedures (how materials are combined or altered); third, scheduling and organisation structures; and fourth, tools and machinery available.

3.1.1 Strategic dimensions of Task Organisation

The general types of strategies, Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control, are of interest only if they are expressed through concrete managerial initiatives. These initiatives are reflected in certain choices which are open to managers concerning the design of activities. The choices will sometimes be perceived as a simple dichotomy, though most often a range of Task Organisation design options will be available. These options will have varying degrees of specificity to the particular labour process being considered, but they may be mapped or translated into dimensions which clearly reflect the Responsible Autonomy/Direct Control strategic framework.

Consider the organisation structure of computer programming. This task can be organised in many different ways. Programmers may be organised in a pool where requests for coding come to them as rather small, discrete tasks which are well specified. Formally the individual programmers will work by themselves on the task. Programmers may also be organised into teams to work on large problems together. Given the same size of project, we would expect the programming work to be less strictly divided up before the work is given to the programmer in the project-team structure compared with the pool structure. On the other hand, programmers may be combined with analysts in a project team which accepts much larger tasks and works together on a much larger collection of the jobs required in the system-development labour process. Even with a project-team organisation structure there are further choices available. For example, does the team stay together once a particular

project has been completed, do individuals belong to more than one team at a time, does the team work on more than one project at a time?

Consider a further example, the actual working procedures of computer programming. This entails transforming a detailed specification into a computer program. There is a wide range of choices concerning the computer language to be used. The choice is not simply: use COBOL or ASSEMBLER or BASIC. Once the formal language is chosen there are still decisions concerning the structure of the final program – should it be broken into smaller sections (modules) and how independent should these modules be? Should any statement in the language be used or should some statements be avoided (such as GOTO statements)?⁵ Does the programmer have to specify where the data to be analysed are to be found and the procedures for entering them into the program, or will this be carried out (semi)-automatically by a piece of software in the programmers' environment (the database management system)?

The particular organisation structure chosen will have fairly clear consequences on the size of tasks programmers are likely to be given, on the variety of those tasks and on the skill requirements for carrying them out. In general we suspect that organisation structures which separate programmers from each other (programming-pool structure) and those which strictly separate programmers from analysts, whether in pools or project teams, are more likely to reduce size and variety of programmer tasks. Size and variety of tasks are not, by themselves, adequate indicators of overall management strategies towards labour. Nevertheless, they are an important component of many types of managerial strategies. They are dimensions of Responsible Autonomy/Direct Control which are quite clearly reflected in Task Organisation choices.

Similarly, the choice of technique for transforming a detailed specification into a program of whatever length will have consequences on the complexity, originality and type of knowledge required of the programming work. Often managers will choose techniques with these strategic dimensions in mind. Structured programming in particular was a technique developed specifically to reduce the originality of programming work, to make the finished program more easily understandable to others. The developers of this technique specifically mention these advantages in their promotional literature (Jackson, 1975; Yourden and Constantine, 1979). On the other hand, the use of techniques such as the computing language

COBOL have less clear consequences on Task Organisation strategic dimensions and are likely to have been adopted because of fashion or the existence of other tools and techniques found on COBOL.

Which strategic dimensions particularly relate to Task Organisation? The following dimensions should be considered: task variety, task length, and task originality. Littler (1982) considers two dimensions to what he calls work design as important: task range and task direction. Our dimensions of task variety and task length may be thought of as subsumed in Littler's task range. It may be that a worker is given a wide range or considerable variety of work to carry out, but that most individual tasks are boring. Requiring workers to perform a wide range of short tasks is very different from giving them a wide range of tasks of very different lengths. The rhythm of work can be an important factor relating to worker satisfaction as well as ease of control over workers.

Littler's category of worker discretion properly belongs to his Control Structure level. His refusal explicitly to consider the strategic dimensions of the labour process lead him to confuse what we have separately called management activities and dimensions of management strategies. Task discretion is a strategic dimension. The degree of discretion a worker is allowed over which tasks to carry out and in what order depends on the degree of direct control managers try to exert. Task range, on the other hand, is a characteristic of Task Organisation.

Task originality is clearly a property of work design. The neglect of such a dimension in the labour process literature stems largely from an overemphasis on manual work. Of course, even with the most common manual labour processes analysed (production-line car workers), a degree of originality can occur when new models are introduced or when uncommon errors are made further up the line. Originality of task is a relative term. Originality may be considered in relation to the labour process in general, such as a computer department developing an entirely new system – one which has not been attempted elsewhere. Originality may also be considered in relation to the particular organisation studied, such as the first real-time computer system developed in that computer installation. Finally, originality may be considered in relation to the particular worker to carry out the task – task elements which are new to that person. Once we appreciate the frequent and continual nature of technical change in most labour processes, originality of tasks be-

comes a strategic dimension which is not isolated to a few professional or scientific workers in research organisations.

3.2 Control Structure

Consider the following three sub-categories of Control Structure activities: (a) instruction and direction procedures, (b) monitoring of people and workflows, (c) evaluation and reward (or punishment) of people. The choice of these activities reflects the idea that there are layers of control. Following the actual flow of work from person to person or group to group in an organisation, there are also cycles of control. The phases of each cycle are control of: the initiation of work, the working process, and the results of the work. The cycle can be controlled through direction and instruction, by measuring and monitoring, and by evaluation and reward (or punishment). These activities are at the heart of what Marx called the valorisation process. These activities are the most directly related to the RA/DC dimension. Task Organisation facilitates or discourages direct control, but the need to co-ordinate workflows and to take advantage of readily available technology can sometimes force managers to make choices on Task Organisation activities which are not in accord with their strategic aims for labour relations. Control Structure activities suffer less from strategic dilution: therefore initiatives on Control Structure are more likely to be clearly viewed by workers, as well as managers, as reflecting management's strategic position. Because of this they are more likely to be the field of open conflict between managers and workers.

3.2.1 Strategic dimensions of Control Structure

The RA/DC dimensions of Control Structure are closeness or degree of detail of direction, monitoring and evaluation. Each of these three dimensions may be thought of as a continuum of possibilities. The three dimensions will often be used as substitutes for each other. Carrying out very detailed instruction procedures with frequent redirection can obviate the need for strict monitoring and careful evaluation in order to achieve substantial direct control. For computer programmers, detailed direction is rare; this reflects the degree of originality of their work. Working out absolutely precise instructions for programming would require something very close to writing

the program itself. Evaluation of programmers' work is also extremely difficult. Complex programs almost always have errors (bugs). Often these errors will come to light only after years of normal working. Also, it is difficult to decide in advance exactly how difficult a programming task may be. The manager who wishes to impose a Direct Control type of strategy is therefore thrown back on rather inadequate monitoring devices. In many departments programmers are required to fill out worksheets on a weekly or fortnightly basis and account for their time on an hourly basis. In other departments records of meeting targets are kept, even though most recognise that target estimation is imprecise. Because of these problems monitoring of systems-development work is often concentrated on monitoring tasks rather than people. Milestones for accountability are set up at various stages in the development process. At each milestone verbal clearance from managers may have to be obtained, structured walk-throughs or reviews of work with peer groups and/or user representatives may have to be carried out – even written reports may have to be signed off.

In general we may supplement the Control Structure strategic dimensions of degree of detail of direction, monitoring and evaluation, with a consideration of whether monitoring is concentrated on people or work tasks. A further strategic dimension would be whether the emphasis of evaluation is on reward or on punishment (bonuses or penalties). Finally, the formality and rigidity with which control structures are maintained is a further strategic dimension worth considering, though this is likely to be influenced by the size of the organisation.

Given the current state of technology available concerning task organisation of computer programming, the strategic range on Control Structure dimensions is centred firmly in the Responsible Autonomy end of the continuum, though during the 1960s and 1970s concerted efforts were made to extend the range at the Direct Control end (see Kraft, 1977; Greenbaum, 1979; Friedman, 1989).

3.3 Labour-Market Relations

These concern the relation between workers and both external and internal labour markets. External labour markets are those markets where labour capacity or labour power is bought and sold. They are the markets from which workers enter the firm and to which they go upon leaving (unless they withdraw from any form of job search).

Internal labour markets are the mechanisms within firms by which people are allocated and reallocated positions of differing pay and status. The original definition of the internal labour market was the allocation of workers according to rules (Doeringer and Piore, 1971). I believe this definition can more usefully be thought of as referring to a particular technique for creating an internal labour market rather than the institution itself.

The particular sub-categories of management activities covered by the Labour-Market Relations category can be thought of as following the progress of an individual through the firm. They are:

- recruitment
- training
- promotion
- separation

3.3.1 Strategic dimensions of Labour-Market Relations

Key strategic dimensions are the relative dependency of the firm on particular staff and the degree to which managers protect the employment positions of individuals. Dependency on particular staff relates to how difficult it may be to replace staff which, in turn, depends on which sorts of people are recruited (by skill and education level) and on what kind of training workers acquire once hired. Training needs to be interpreted broadly in order to link it with dependency. Formal training may be less important for individualising workers in management's eyes than informal firm-specific knowledge acquired through experience of particular work tasks and lateral relations within that firm. This latter form of training is particularly important for computer programmers.

Every computer department is somewhat different from any other because of the different systems which are in place as well as differences in pieces of basic equipment (hardware and system software). Programmers become much more valuable to a computer-department manager once they acquire a good working knowledge of the computer environment of an installation. This depends as much on the collection of equipment and systems in place as on the system and programming standards and the existing internal working procedures.

Dependency on individual workers encourages managers to try to retain those workers. This, however, is not the same thing as actually

giving those workers employment security. The internal labour market is important here. If managers have a well-developed system of job ladders where recruitment to higher positions is normally restricted to workers in lower positions through simple seniority rules or through provisions for additional training, then employment security is being offered. Whether or not any workers are laid off is not, by itself, an accurate measure of whether the managers are pursuing an employment-security tactic. If a firm is losing a lot of money, it must cut costs to survive. This must eventually come down to laying off workers. Internal promotion and last-in-first-out lay-off arrangements are better indicators.

3.4 Lateral Relations

An important category of management activities is the encouraging, discouraging and structuring of communication among workers. By this I do not mean the delegation of control activities from top managers to lower-level staff. That belongs to the Control Structure category. Rather, it is the form and character of communication among workers of similar status or of different status, but with no clear authority relation between them. Communication among workers within a work group or between people in different departments are examples of such Lateral Relations. In the computing world communication between system developers and system users, or their managers, is an important set of relations which are currently the site of considerable management attention and initiative (Friedman, 1989).

Lateral Relations among workers become an important category of activities for top managers trying to maintain overall authority over all their workers. This is because it is possible for top managers to reduce the inflexibility inherent in their strategies by splitting workers into various groups and applying different types of strategies towards different groups. Encouraging divisions among workers often weakens overall worker resistance, but dividing workers according to applied managerial strategies also helps to counteract the inflexibility peculiar to each type of strategy. The employment security of one group of workers can be more easily assured if cost reduction is achieved by laying off members of other groups first. Also, if workers in the second group are more easily laid off and if the division between the group is widespread throughout society, then the reserve army for the second group will be larger and it will be easier to

impose greater direct control over the second group within the enterprise.

Dividing workers into groups will also make it easier for top managers to reverse directions with either group. The privileges of the group to which top managers apply Responsible Autonomy strategies may be more easily undermined if a mass of unprivileged workers are readily available. Also, disruption arising from disputes with other groups may be bypassed if the work they do could be done by others.

Top managers can effectively split their labour force only if workers of one group do not act in solidarity with those of other groups. This usually means that it is easier for top managers to divide their labour force along lines of general division in the society as a whole. Groups of workers who are subjected to the Responsible Autonomy type of strategy (what I call central workers) are usually male, white, adult, native people. Groups of workers who are subjected to a Direct Control type of strategy (what I call peripheral workers) are usually females, non-whites, adolescents or immigrants. (Combinations of these characteristics make peripheral status even more likely.)

Nevertheless, an effective centre/periphery pattern requires the sort of lateral relations which might discourage co-operation and sympathy between groups.

3.4.1 Strategic dimensions of Lateral Relations

The key dimensions are:

- (a) whether Lateral Relations are encouraged to take a human or a non-human form; and
- (b) whether the spirit of Lateral Relations is co-operation or competition.

Whether the Control Structure takes a human or non-human form is not a strong strategic indicator. Supervision can be very detailed and direct in a personal form, as Taylor so graphically demonstrated in his example of Schmidt, the pig-iron loader (Taylor, 1911). Lateral Relations in a personal form, on the other hand, are more likely to be a technique of achieving a Responsible Autonomy type of strategy. The Direct Control type of strategy in this category of activities is guided by the attempt to isolate individual workers from their

co-workers. Malcahy and Faulkner (1977 and 1979) have called this process 'individuation' of work: 'It denotes a work process in which people are separated from one another and there is an absence of structured interpersonal relations on the job, save for those of a most superficial sort' (1979: 228).

The overall pattern of Lateral Relations in Malcahy and Faulkner's study was directly controlled through the process of work individuation. Nevertheless, the few remaining human contacts were not directly structured by managers. The result was that such relations gave rise to conflict.

Conflict among groups of workers is not necessarily an indication of management failure. Some believe it to be quite the contrary. Burawoy (1979), examining a similar work situation, interprets conflicts between machine operators and ancillary workers (such as stockmen and maintenance workers) as a clear management ploy to displace workers' frustrations and anger with managers on to fellow-workers.

Lateral Relations among white-collar workers are often much more structured by management. In computer departments programming work is usually carried out in teams. Many managers explicitly eschew individuation by trying to get programmers to work together, to check each others' code internally and to discuss procedures. To achieve 'egoless programming' is a stated aim of many computer managers (Weinberg, 1971; Friedman and Greenbaum, 1984). To say that Lateral Relations are structured is not to say that they are directly controlled; they may be structured with a Responsible Autonomy strategy in mind. Lateral Relations is a category of activities neglected by many managers. When it receives attention, it is often by managers who lean towards a Responsible Autonomy strategy. This is because positive initiatives in these activities often mean dealing with workers on the level of their peculiarly human characteristics, their ability to communicate meaningfully. This can, of course, be a great advantage to management, but turning it to management's advantage requires more than simply ordering it to be so.

This is to some extent *the* key problem area for computer managers at the moment with respect to Lateral Relations between computer staff and computer users. To improve relations with users, computer managers have initiated a wide range of activity changes which include altering internal recruitment policies and task organisation as well as bringing users into the system-development process (Friedman and Cornford, 1987).

4 TECHNIQUES AND TECHNOLOGY

Management activities are relatively independent of time. They comprise tasks which may change in prominence over time as the 'cutting edge' of managers' attention shifts from one activity to another in response to slippage. Nevertheless the tasks are always there, even if often unnoticed. Lateral Relations, for example, may often be neglected by managers (and by management theorists). None the less, they always occur in some form or other. They are available for managers to manipulate, activities to be managed, whether the opportunity is grasped or not. They are the field or terrain upon which managerial initiatives are executed.

Strategies are the positions which we wish to chart. They too are relatively independent of time. Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control as a basic dichotomy or continuum is general to the labour process in any class-divided mode of production.

What is it that changes over time? It is *primarily* (though not entirely) the techniques or technology of management and the labour process. New techniques and technologies stimulate different activities and different strategic dimensions of activities to become prominent in the labour process. However, the particular management strategies pursued and the particular activities and strategic dimensions prominent at any one time will depend on many factors apart from technology. Furthermore, technologies do not develop as manna from heaven (or any other exogenous location). By and large, which new techniques are actually introduced – and particularly which ones become widespread – depends on market conditions, particular management strategies being pursued and their interactions with worker resistance.

Technology is one of those words that many people use, but it seems to encompass different concepts to different people. According to the *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary (OED)* a technique is the 'manner of artistic execution in relation to formal or practical details', or 'the mechanical or formal part of an art especially of any of the fine arts', or 'skill or ability in this department of one's art', or 'mechanical skill in artistic work'. Technique comes from *technic*, derived from the Greek word which means simply 'of or pertaining to art'. Now the term has become both narrower and wider. It is narrower in that it refers to formal, mechanical or practical aspects of an activity, rather than simply 'of or pertaining to' it. It is wider in that it refers to any activity which requires learned skill or innate

talent, the industrial and even the domestic arts as well as the fine arts.

Let us interpret technique in the following, rather wide sense. First, let it refer to any conscious activity, as is the common usage. Second – and I think also in common usage today – the terms formal, mechanical or practical are all too narrow to capture what a technique is. Rather, a technique is a way of carrying out conscious activity which can potentially be understood. Therefore it could possibly be acquired by others, even though it may remain secret. Recently the term was used in this way referring to Sir Laurence Olivier's acting techniques. An actress interviewed on television (BBC 2, March 1985), who had worked with Olivier, remarked that Olivier was not generous in sharing his acting techniques with his colleagues. She implied that there were certain aspects of his acting which *could* have been conveyed to others and perhaps reproduced by them, even though Olivier chose not to convey these aspects.

Technology, according to the *OED*, is the systematic treatment of an art or craft in relation to a discourse or treatise, or to scientific study, or to the terminology of the art or craft, or to the practical arts collectively themselves. Technology in the sociological literature has, I believe, acquired a far narrower meaning. Technology is associated with machinery, tools and chemical or electrical processes, though in this sense 'technology' is usually prefixed with 'modern' or 'twentieth-century'. The concept of technology has become detached from human activity. It is seen as a thing in itself, or a collection or system of things.

A second, even narrower, definition of technology has also crept into the literature. This is to identify technology with the frequency of producing similar items. The well-known classification of technologies into research or prototype, small-batch, large-batch, mass-production and process, which in England is associated with the work of Joan Woodward (1965), has become so well accepted as to be considered a definition of technology rather than one among many possible classifications of technologies. The popularity of this classification stems from the strong line of causality which is drawn from type of technology to the character of work organisation and to the degree of conflict in industrial relations. Mass-production technology, for example, is presumed to cause the worst industrial relations. The danger with these definitions is that they objectify technology, leading us to think of it as independent of human will. Furthermore,

it is deputed great influence on human affairs which is, in turn, treated as though it were beyond human influence.

For example, some have viewed technology as the force to drive the world into a new Utopia, a global village (McLuhan, 1964). For others technology is the horse of doom (Mumford, 1963) or alienation (Ellul, 1974). In part this overwhelming role given to technology by some sociologists has occurred as a reaction against the exclusion of technology and technological change from the dominant neoclassical economic framework. The pendulum has swung from technology having no place on the stage of analysis, to its occupying the entire stage.

While this latter view is being rejected by many analysts looking at new technology in the past few years (Cooley, 1980; Child and Loveridge, 1981; Rosenbrock, 1981; Moore and Levie, 1981; Bessant and Dickson, 1982; Friedman, 1983, among many others), beyond noting that technology is mediated by social processes, the analysis of technology has not progressed very far. Progress can be made if we link techniques and technology with management strategies and activities.

Techniques have been defined as ways of carrying out conscious activities which can potentially be understood by others. In essence, they are social – capable, by definition, of being communicated, shared and imitated. Technology in its broadest sense refers to a collection of techniques. The collection could refer to all the techniques available in a society, then technology would come close to Marx's notion of the forces of production. But technology can also refer to certain techniques which have wide strategic implications in that they limit or enhance choices as to how to pursue a wide range of other activities, or affect the work patterns of many people. The decision to introduce a technology (a wide-ranging technique) will not force managers to choose any particular point between Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control, but it will affect the visible forms that express their strategic position and *may* encourage them to choose strategic positions in one of the directions. If we accept the latter definition of technology (super-techniques), as well as the former (collection of techniques), then the difference between technology and techniques is only a matter of degree.

For example, the primary computer language used in a computer department will be a wide-ranging technique in that it will affect the way work is divided up and the sorts of skills required for programm-

ing work. Similarly, which size and generation of computer is chosen, whether systems are developed on line or in batch mode and the establishment of clearly structured internal labour markets are all general techniques, or rather technologies. On the other hand, computer-department techniques would include which type of VDUs are purchased or the degree of structure in the structured programming techniques recommended.

Reading Kraft (1977), one is led to believe that structured programming methodologies represented a key new technology which would significantly deskill programming work. In fact, we discovered that structured programming *techniques* were rarely imposed, usually used in practice by no more than a handful of programmers in any one department, and sometimes actually introduced by the programmers themselves (Friedman and Cornford, 1987; Friedman, 1989). This example demonstrates how the social effects of techniques or technology depend on strategic and social circumstances in the labour process into which they are introduced. Structured programming methods could deskill programmers. In fact this was the idea behind their development, according to their promoters (Weinwurm, 1971). In fact they have slightly reduced managerial dependence on particular programmers by making their programs easier to understand (and therefore easier to maintain and enhance) by others. Nevertheless, continued labour shortages have limited managers' desires to impose Direct Control type strategies on programmers. This has encouraged structured programming methods to be treated as tools which *programmers* may choose to use according to their own judgement.

5 DYNAMICS

Associated with different categories of activities are techniques or technologies. As we saw in the previous section, it is the technologies which mainly change over time. The types of strategy are common to all class-divided societies and the categories of activities are common to any labour process. Which particular strategies are pursued, which particular activities are emphasised, the degree of success managers achieve and the strength and character of worker resistance will change over time, but not in a monotonic cumulative fashion. The only cumulatively growing aspect of the model is the experiences of the labour process, and these are reflected in the growing collection of available techniques and technologies. Even these do not increase

cumulatively because some old techniques disappear, through lack of use, and may never be rediscovered.

It is at this level that I believe Edwards's framework in *Contested Terrain* (1979) should be interpreted. His shifts from Simple (or Personal) Control to Technical and Bureaucratic Control are not, as he implies, changes towards deeper and more complete management control over labour. Rather, they are different technologies with respect to the Control Structure category of managerial activities. By themselves, they do not impose greater management control or coercion of labour. With each there is a range of possible strategic positions (in the Responsible Autonomy/Direct Control sense) and a range of possible degrees of success.

A key dynamic aspect of the model is the relation between market conditions and managerial strategies. When competitive conditions are severe, top managers will move towards Direct Control type strategies and will try to reduce the proportion of central compared with peripheral workers. In severe product-market conditions, top managers will try to reduce costs quickly. This will involve laying off workers, which will be difficult when managers are using Responsible Autonomy type strategies. Similarly, when firms enjoy a high degree of monopoly power they will be able to enjoy the luxury of a higher proportion of central workers and the pursuit of Responsible Autonomy type strategies. The former prediction is most likely when severe competitive conditions are accompanied by undersupply in labour-capacity markets.

Considerable evidence for these predictions was presented in *Industry and Labour*. The response to changing market conditions can occur in any of the strategic dimensions and in any category of activities. Nevertheless, moves towards Direct Control, stimulated by increasingly severe market conditions, are likely to lead to changes in labour-market relations first. This may then lead to a situation of incompatibility between strategies pursued relating to this category of activities and those relating to the other categories. The incompatibility may then stimulate worker resistance. In fact this is the way I would interpret the general situation in the British car industry from the mid-1950s until the late 1960s. The strong Responsible Autonomy strategy built up during the 1940s and early 1950s was undermined by periodic substantial lay offs (associated in part with government stop-go policies). The dramatic rise in strike-proneness after 1955 is largely attributable to the undermining of a major dimension of Responsible Autonomy strategies: employment security. Only from

the late 1960s onwards did top managers introduce substantial changes in other strategic dimensions.

At any one time, seemingly incompatible choices may be taken in different strategic dimensions. In part this will occur because of substitution effects (see 3.2.1), in part because of genuine incompatibilities due to lack of managerial effort, or the difficulty of changing strategies on all dimensions at the same time, or compromises forced on managers by workers.

The next dynamic element of the model is the internal dynamic of the interplay between managerial strategies, worker resistance and managerial counter-pressure. In this chapter I have been concentrating on managerial initiatives. Aspects of the framework such as the proposition of more than one strategy and of centre/periphery relations arise because workers are not the same as other 'factors of production'. They do not have a fixed specification and do not produce in a way which allows the application of deterministic models. But workers cannot be analysed as agents who do what managers say they should do, plus some random (irrational?) element. Workers have their own strategies and will react to managerial initiatives in fairly predictable positive and negative ways.

The degree of resistance stimulated by managerial initiatives will be different for different strategic dimensions. This will depend on worker strategies and goals and these, in turn, will be influenced by factors such as labour-market conditions, the general level of class struggle, state policies and general cultural or structural factors within a community or country (such as the heterogeneity of the community, levels of education, character of family life). Labour-market conditions are obviously particularly important for strategic dimensions associated with the Labour-Market Relations category of activities. For example, during periods of high unemployment particular groups of workers regard employment security as their top priority. On the other hand computer programmers, who do not have much trouble getting jobs once they have acquired a few years' experience, often leave employment because of low task originality. The chairman of one of Britain's largest computer software houses stated that the company looked for work which would challenge their staff in order to keep them. He also stated that they had refused profitable work which did not comply with this standard. Certainly this is a rare occurrence; nevertheless it is very difficult to imagine in industries where labour shortages do not exist.

6 SUMMARY: TECHNOLOGY, STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES

The three elements of the model of management in the labour process interrelate in the following way. Managers must carry out certain activities or tasks in order to make profits. In so doing they must maintain authority over workers. Categories of activities which are normally important for maintaining authority over workers include Task Organisation, Control Structure, Labour-Market Relations and Lateral Relations. What managers actually choose, the way these activities might be carried out, have been called techniques. Technology is defined either as a collection of techniques or as techniques with wide strategic implications.

In order to maintain authority over workers, managers pursue strategies which can be summarised as in the direction of either Responsible Autonomy or Direct Control. These strategies are articulated in the choices of techniques made by managers when carrying out activities. In order to measure the relative degree of Responsible Autonomy or Direct Control being pursued within a particular labour process, strategic dimensions associated with categories of activities must be considered. Often positions on different strategic dimensions will seem incompatible, in that they may be at widely different points between Responsible Autonomy and Direct Control extremes of the dimension. Nevertheless, positions along strategic dimensions are expected to move in predictable directions, with varying speeds, in response to changing market conditions, the changing balance of class struggle, both within and outside particular labour process, and changing technical opportunities.

Notes

1. Wood and Kelly (1982: 7.7) demonstrate the different moments resulting in difficult-to-explain circumstances by the example of high labour exploitation but weak control in the case of skilled craft workers. Clearly they have misunderstood the Responsible Autonomy strategy, by which managers attempt to maintain authority over workers by reducing *direct* control and by encouraging workers to use their best endeavours to work quickly and to high standards (that is, high rate of surplus value).
2. Less likely to survive as top managers does not necessarily mean the firms they run are less likely to survive. Top management personnel often change in response to takeovers or at the behest of financial interests long before an organisation may be forced to close down.

3. As I pointed out in *Industry and Labour*, it is important to distinguish between control as a relative concept in the sense of a frontier of control and control in the sense of who makes the primary initiatives founded on a legal (or, at times, a moral) basis.
4. They are the terrain on which contests occur; in that sense they are contested terrain, to use Edwards's (1979) phrase. But they are not the goal itself; they are not what is fought over, merely the place of battle.
5. Refer to the famous Avoid GOTO's debate (Dijkstra, 1968).

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7 A Ghost in the Machine?: The State and the Labour Process in Theory and Practice

Dominic Strinati

The labour-process debate, in spite of its seemingly parochial character, has succeeded in stimulating interest in a wide range of areas of social scientific inquiry and research. Studies and speculation about gender, race, class, the modern corporation, the state – amongst other things – have, in part at least, drawn up and referred back to the veritable stream of books, articles, reviews, and polemics unleashed by the publication of Harry Braverman's book *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. It is difficult to describe this as a seminal book in a genuine sense because the established majority opinion about it now tends to be critical and sometimes condescending, although it has rarely become directly dismissive and hostile. Yet few books over the last two or three decades have managed to acquire a literature all of their own. While this may be surprising with respect to Braverman's book, let alone the other examples which could be cited, it is clear that *Labor and Monopoly Capital* focused upon a crucial structure of modern capitalism that had not normally been treated in such a way before, and that it raised fundamental problems even if it obviously failed to resolve them.¹

Some of the questions it poses are quite evidently presented more adequately than others: compare the discussions of class and gender, bearing in mind the fact that Braverman did consider the role of gender in the labour process.² In a way, Braverman's treatment of the state and politics and their relation to the labour process – the central theme of this chapter – is illustrative of this point. It is not, however, typical, for other parts of Braverman's argument aspire to much greater originality and find support in much more extensive detail. What Braverman has to say about the state is heavily reliant

upon the conception of its role in advanced or monopoly capitalism first put forward by Baran and Sweezy.³ Indeed, Braverman's analysis – or, rather, his lack of analysis – of the state has been one of the most notable features of his work to draw the fire of his critics.⁴ For what Braverman does is to conceive of the state as a kind of appendage which is merely 'external' to the labour process; it never seems to have an effect inside it but rather stands on the sidelines of class conflict, the degradation of work, and the deskilling of labour. Given the relative unoriginality of his discussion of the state and the way – in his analysis – it functions outside the labour process, the question of how to conceive of the connections between the labour process and politics has been central both to the critiques advanced of Braverman's work and to the more general theoretical debates. It is something about which I shall say more in this chapter, since it has formed one of the starting points for thinking about the place of the state in the labour process. So the first issue I want to touch on is how we might begin to specify the role of politics and the state by looking, albeit briefly and critically, at some of the theoretical problems raised by the labour process debate.

Around the time Braverman's book was published, another debate, one equally rooted in Marxist theory, was under way on the correct or most useful theorisations of the contemporary capitalist state.⁵ This set of arguments seemed to take place on a higher level of abstraction than the labour process debate. Although this may be an optical illusion produced by the ever-growing distance of time and interest, it was certainly true that the latter made more frequent references to empirical evidence both because it was more obviously tied to one particular society or historical epoch, and because it was able to draw upon the facts produced by industrial sociology, one of the best-developed areas within sociology in terms of research done and reported, even if such references were ultimately made purely for the sake of polemic and criticism. The debate over theories of the state, on the other hand, was conducted almost as if it needed but could not find a substantial body of empirical research to tap into and refer back to and to give substance, however cursory, to otherwise quite ethereal theoretical categories. Hence, for example, the gestures made towards the analysis of Fascism.⁶ Hence also the interest in corporatism and in the role of the state in industrial relations, another reason for the increasing attention devoted to the politics of industrial relations – an attention made all the more urgent by the

absence of any 'politics' in the original sub-discipline of industrial sociology.

It has now become customary, in textbooks and collections of readings on industrial sociology and industrial relations, to include a section or a discussion on the role of the state, covering such topics as incomes policies, trade-union legislation, labour-market strategies, and so on.⁷ This, however, has less to do with the above-mentioned debates, especially that on theories of the state, than the seemingly more and more obvious intrusion of the government and its agencies in the organisation and management of industrial relations. I say 'seemingly . . . obvious' because once the process is thought through it becomes evident that the state has always intervened in industrial relations; it is just that the ways in which it has done so, and the manner by which it has made its presence felt, have changed in form and substance over time. Thus the more salient, more detailed and more documented part that the state has played in industrial relations in the post-war period, while of course varying between different societies, has provoked a change in the staple diet of those disciplines concerned with the study of management-worker-union relations in industry. But while this has been a welcome advance, correcting to some extent the tendency to view industrial relations as an isolated system, it is fair to suggest that it does not amount to an understanding of the role of the state which is integrated into the overall analysis of the structures of industrial relations. Once again the state and politics are left outside, regarded as external forces which can only 'intervene' in but can never be considered a part of differing systems of industrial relations.

The above discussion can be taken as a preamble to what I wish to argue in this chapter. Taking up the challenge posed by the promise and vacuity of the theories of the state debate, I wish to suggest that it is necessary to begin to reconsider how we try to think about the state and politics with respect to industrial relations – that rather than conceiving of the state as an external monolith, standing outside and apart from the general run of industrial relations, we need to understand the differing and specific ways in which politics and the state are tied into and are part of particular types of industrial-relations structures. In order to initiate this process I shall therefore try to clarify two concepts of political organisation – corporatism and populism, which have been applied with increasing frequency to the study of recent trends in British industrial relations⁸ – so as to suggest

how this approach might get round some of the problems I have identified. And to provide a context for the suggestions I wish to put forward, it will be necessary to consider, first, aspects of the theorisations of the relationships between politics and industrial relations in already-existing work on the labour process. However, merely to start to reconceptualise this area would be to repeat past errors, and I shall therefore also wish to try to illustrate how these concepts might be used to interpret a number of key phases in the recent history of industrial relations in Britain. Accordingly I shall review, admittedly in a somewhat cursory manner, the record of British governments in the 1970s and 1980s with respect to the 'intervention' of the state in industrial relations and with a view to assessing the extent to which what has happened can be understood in terms of the meanings furnished by the concepts of pluralism and corporatism.

To this end, a particular theme that will be singled out for separate attention, both theoretical and empirical, will be the role of 'fractions of capital' or structurally and motivationally distinct sets of employers' and managers' interests in the reordering of industrial relations and in influencing the 'intervention' of the state. This is one theme which, in point of fact, forms a kind of causal link between the theories-of-the-state debate and the empirical study of the politics of industrial relations, since it has figured quite significantly in both areas of inquiry and examination yet has not received the conceptual and factual scrutiny that it has deserved. I shall therefore endeavour to say something about this theme, integral as it is both to the theory of the politics of industrial relations and to the changing but specific historical reality of the role of the state.

The labour process debate itself has been concerned with the question of how the organisation of work in capitalist societies might be theorised in terms of its characteristic relations, and how these realise and perpetuate the control and exploitation of labour or the working class. In other words, the debate has had a typically Marxist base and has thus been taken up with the evaluation, acceptance, reformation, or critical rejection of the idea that in modern capitalism it is necessary for surplus labour and/or surplus value to be 'pumped out' of the worker at the point of production.⁹ It has therefore addressed itself to describing, explaining, and researching the means by which this necessity is fulfilled in practice – and, indeed, in theory as well – by the changing structure of control in and over the labour process. Needless to say, not all the participants in the debate have

subscribed to these propositions, nor to their underlying theoretical assumptions: that, after all, is what the debate has been about. But they are the issues in relation to which the place of the state and politics in the analysis has or has not been considered.

If we take for granted the fact that there are studies of the labour process, be they theoretical or empirical, which consistently neglect to acknowledge or discuss the significance of the state and politics, it is probably fair to say that there are two distinct ways by which this significance has been registered. One has been the 'external' role ascribed to the state to which I have already referred: the notion that the state and the political relations it defines exist outside of – and hence merely 'intervene' in – the labour process. Despite some conscious and not so conscious provisos to the contrary, this emphasis is characteristic of the approach of both Braverman and 'orthodox' industrial sociology to this problem. The other has been the attempt to capture the essentially political nature of the labour process: the argument that politics and the state are integral to, not divorced from, its structure and control. Perhaps the best example here is the work of Burawoy, though it can emerge in the work of those who take it as axiomatic that capitalist work gives rise to struggles.¹⁰

If we take Braverman as our example of what we may term the 'externalist' view of the role of the state in industrial relations, it is immediately noticeable that he devotes relatively few pages to an actual discussion of the state.¹¹ Looking closely, however, at what he does have to say indicates precisely how he conceives of the state's role. The theory of the state to which Braverman appears to hold is an orthodox Marxist one which is used as a way of depicting the structure of monopoly capitalism: what Braverman is concerned with is the role which falls to the state in the present era of monopoly capitalism, and the effects this has on the labour process and the occupational structure. For Braverman, the state always acts to guarantee the social relations of capitalism, protect class inequalities, and enrich the capitalist class. But with monopoly capitalism and the attendant economic surplus, internationalisation of capital, and poverty and insecurity it engenders, the role of the state expands as it takes on new services like the provision of education and welfare, or extends 'older' functions like the police and prisons. This, in general, gives rise to changes in the occupational rather than the class structure: public-sector clerical and administrative work is increased and this, for Braverman, is still working-class labour. It is only the expansion of 'professional' occupations in areas like education and

which has some impact on class, introducing a 'stratum' or the 'middle layers' of employment between capital and the working class.

Although what I have had to say has been dictated by the constraints of space, I do not think I have done Braverman an injustice in outlining his argument. It is clear from the above that the only effect the state can have on the labour process is an external one; it can directly affect the occupational structure, but precisely what this means for the labour process is never made apparent. This is because the state and the more specific political strategies with which it is associated are never considered as integral to the labour process. This tendency is perhaps a legacy of the economic reductionism which Braverman's Marxism has inherited – the labour process, since it is the focal point of class exploitation and control, can be structured only by capital and not by the state – but whatever its source, it is typical of one particular strand in the analysis of the labour process and the state.

In order to appreciate this more fully, it can be pointed out that in some of the more recent texts on the labour process, or on class and work, the state tends to get a separate section or chapter to itself. This is the case, for example, with Littler and Salaman's book *Class at Work* where the state gets a separate four-page section.¹² It is none the less interesting that to some extent they go beyond their mainly external view of the state in recognising that

attempts to lower the price of labour take two classic forms, used as functional alternatives: direct intervention by government in levels of wage increases through formal wage control or varieties of 'social contract'; and indirect, through allowing an increase in unemployment to take place.

This distinction is indeed crucial to what I shall have to say below regarding the way in which the state has been integral to developments in the recent history of British industrial relations, and it does begin to take account of the differing ways in which the state and the labour process are interconnected. But this interconnection is still thought about in terms of the state 'intervening' in the labour process, a state somehow standing above and apart from the processes of work relations; in consequence, therefore, the precise nature and qualities of state 'intervention' and what specifically distinguishes types of state 'intervention', rarely enter into any analytical reckoning.

This criticism may seem slightly unfair in that Littler and Salaman have elsewhere distanced themselves from Braverman's argument in their insistence that not only is control of the labour process not as important as Braverman suggests, but that in so far as control is secured it is as dependent upon forces outside the labour process – like the state – as it is upon the domination exercised by capital at the workplace.¹³ Yet the very terms in which they couch their interpretation imply that while they do not share Braverman's particular understanding of the labour process, they still share his view of the relation between the state and the labour process. On the other hand, their critique brings out very well what many have seen to be a major fault in Braverman's work: his failure to realise that the analysis of the control and restructuring of the labour process cannot be separate from the analysis of political structures of control, including those characteristic of historically specific phases of state 'intervention'. As Elger, for example, notes with respect to the debate within Marxism on the significance of state institutions for the reconstruction of class relations:

this in no way denies the significance of an analysis of the development of the capitalist labour process, but it does argue that such an analysis must . . . remain sensitive to the complex relationships between class relations in production and broader forms of political domination and struggle. . . . In relation to such debate Braverman notices the central significance of economistic trade unionism for the character of working class accommodation with advanced capitalism. He implies however that this mode of accommodation arises directly out of the forms taken by capital accumulation and the capitalist labour process in the era of 'monopoly capitalism', rather than being a complex and contradictory product of the interrelation between such developments and the organisation of politics and state activity in capitalist society.¹⁴

It should perhaps be added that it is possible to make this criticism without sharing the theoretical concerns which inform Elger's article. For Littler and Salaman, despite their critique of Braverman, argue that 'the subordination of labour, real or otherwise, cannot be understood at the level of the labour process',¹⁵ suggesting instead that the issue of control has to be located in the 'external' relationships between the labour process, the market and the state. But whichever theoretical framework is preferred, the point remains

essentially the same: the relationship between the state and the labour process is still conceived of in terms of the state intervening in the labour process, in terms of the externality of these two structures, so that little or no attention is paid to the precise and varying nature of distinct forms of the relationship between the labour process and the state.

Before going on to develop this idea – in however tentative a fashion – below, I shall first consider the reverse theoretical tendency to that discussed above: the attempt to provide an integrated analysis of the state–labour process relation. In so doing I shall single out what has probably been the most sophisticated effort so far to understand how politics and the state are integral to the labour process. Despite the obvious and gestural emphasis in some Marxist writing on the essentially political character of all class struggles, including the political class struggle at the point of production, one of the few Marxist authors to present a serious analysis of this issue is Burawoy who, in a number of books and articles, has tried to conceptualise and illustrate the political structuring of the labour process. In his book *Manufacturing Consent*, for example, he develops the concept of the ‘internal state’, though this has subsequently been withdrawn. The concept of the ‘internal state’ refers to those institutions within the labour process which regulate and contain struggles and conflicts – which manage the ‘class struggle’. The ‘internal state’ organises, transforms and represses such struggles in order to ensure the reproduction of the capitalist labour process and its characteristic class relations. To gauge more precisely what is at issue here, it is perhaps worth quoting Burawoy’s annotated history of the internal state derived from the case study which provides the baseline for his theoretical departures:

it is in no way a new phenomenon, although it takes on a radically different form under monopoly capitalism. Under competitive capitalism, except where craft organisation existed, the regulation or relations in production was largely carried out by the despotic overseer. The relationship between management and labour was modeled on master–servant laws. With the rise of large corporations and trade unionism, the institutions of the internal state have become disentangled from the managerial direction of the labour process and embodied in grievance procedures and collective bargaining. The emerging internal state protects the managerial prerogative to fashion and direct the labour process by imposing

constraints on managerial discretion and by endowing workers with rights as well as obligations.¹⁶

It is not necessary to agree with Burawoy's history to grasp the point he is making: the internal state, along with other institutions like the internal labour market and the construction of work as a 'game', co-ordinates the interests of workers and managers and allows the labour process to work through institutions which in effect confer industrial citizenship upon workers, like grievance procedures, collective bargaining, seniority rules and so on.

It should immediately be apparent that this approach is very different from that characteristic of writers like Braverman who treat the state as an appendage of the labour process. In contrast, Burawoy tries to understand central features of the workplace both in political terms – the internal state describes the politics of the workplace – and in terms of the emergence of the liberal democratic state – the internal state describes the effects of political democracy. This means that at the very least the analysis of politics and the state does not become a separate problem but is incorporated into the very centre of labour process studies. Thus, for example, discussion of the state's role need not be confined to the extent to which it 'intervenes' in the labour process but can begin to take account of the more precise and historically varied ways in which the state, and broader political processes like democratisation, are bound up with changes in the labour process.

In his more recent work Burawoy has tended to move away from this particular conception of the relationship between the state and the labour process: that is, of using the term 'internal state' to refer to the state's impact upon the labour process while retaining the term 'global state' to refer to what is more conventionally seen as the wider, 'expanded' or 'macro' role of the state. In a later and more ambitious study, Burawoy had introduced the idea of 'factory regimes' in the labour process,¹⁷ and it is perhaps by looking at this contrast that we shall be able to bring out some of the weaknesses in his approach. Let us first read what Burawoy has to say on these points:

I christened the regulating institutions that embodied and guaranteed this hegemonic order the 'internal state', underlining the analogies with the 'external state'. However, once the central point has been made that there was a politics outside the state – that is, a

production politics as well as a state politics – the concept of ‘internal state’ was of limited analytical use. It had to go for at least two reasons. First, it blurred the essential association of the state with the monopoly of the means of organised coercion, guaranteed by armed bodies of men and women. The state remains the decisive nucleus of power in capitalist societies in that it guarantees the constellations of power outside the state, in the family, the factory, the community, and so on. In this sense state politics is ‘global’ politics; it is the politics of politics. The second reason for abandoning the concept of ‘internal state’ was its unjustified focus on the factory. There was no obvious warrant for referring to factory apparatuses as an internal state while denying such a designation for family apparatuses. I therefore stuck to the idea of politics of production, whose locus and object were not an ‘internal state’ but simply the political apparatuses of production. The concept of factory regime encompasses these apparatuses and the political effects of the labour process.¹⁸

Burawoy then proceeds to use his ideas in comparative and historical ways which need not concern us here, though it has to be noted that his interest lies more with the labour process as such, despite the repeated references to the importance of the state for the structuring of the labour process, while clearly I am more interested in the latter – in so far as it is possible to separate the two at all.

What is perhaps of more immediate relevance is the fact that apart from setting out the conceptual distance between the formal institutions of the state and the politics of the labour process by dropping the use of the word ‘state’, Burawoy does not get very much further in developing our understanding of the ‘similarities and differences between workplace and state apparatuses’.¹⁹ Now this may be partly due to his aim to construct a basis for comparing labour processes within different types of societies, for example, bureaucratic state socialism and monopoly capitalism – or within societies over time – for example, market and monopoly capitalism: but it none the less leads to an unnecessary and overly abstract quality in his thinking which tends to detract from the usefulness of his work when considering historically quite specific examples of the state–labour process relation. That is to say: Burawoy’s theoretical and macro-historical concerns, valuable and worthwhile in their own way, do not take us very much closer to the more finely grained, complex and detailed history of particular societies at particular points in time. In

this sense the concept of factory regime is no better and no worse than that of the 'internal state', and notions of the 'hegemonic' as opposed to the 'market-despotic' forms of the labour process do not really say enough about specific labour processes, let alone about the involvement and influence of the state, to bring us that much closer to a solution of the problem. Unlike Braverman, Burawoy has probably pointed us in the right direction. However, if our aim is to analyse the differing relationships between the state and the labour process in particular societies at certain and specified points in time, then the notion of a 'hegemonic regime' in the labour process, of a 'hegemonic' politics of production, does not take us very far. It may well be that this is not Burawoy's intention, but it would be interesting to see how far his typology and his conceptual derivations would hold up if applied in the manner I have suggested. I think this point can be sustained even if it is claimed that Burawoy is concerned with theorising the labour process and not the state: the advance he makes is to suggest that the two cannot be separated and that the labour process has a politics which needs to be conceptualised, and I am arguing that these preliminary starting points still need to be developed if this approach is to be used in studying the kind of cases in which I am interested and which I think provide the ultimate test of any theory of the politics of the labour process.

In view of what I have argued so far, it is now time for me to lay myself on the line. So far I have suggested that, generally speaking, studies of the labour process have tended to proceed by assuming an artificial and arbitrary separation between the state and the labour process – one which is rarely argued out – and therefore fail to get to grips with the specific politics of the labour process, the varying forms by which the state can structure it. Some important attempts had been made, as I tried to outline, to get round this problem, but they had been somewhat limited in their scope and relevance, being still bound up with theoretical concerns and polemics rather than the demands of specific historical case studies. I now wish to go on to develop my own views. I am not going to set up an alternative and equally grand theoretical framework, since I think these often miss the point. Instead I want to develop some ideas and concepts which seem relevant to the recent history of industrial relations in Britain, and try to illustrate the difficulties and contingencies as well as the

lessons which can be learnt from this particular case. Perhaps then, with more examples of this kind, we can move on to the wider theoretical arguments which have been considered in the first part of this chapter.

CORPORATISM AND POPULISM

One of the issues which has preoccupied those interested in state theory and the changing structure of industrial relations in advanced Western societies, but has not really had much impact upon the labour process debate, has been the concept of corporatism and whether and to what extent its arrival was imminent.²⁰ More recently, this concern has tended to be pushed to one side by the election of Margaret Thatcher in 1979 and the subsequent dissection of the ideologies and state policies engendered by her governments, which has thrown up such concepts as 'Thatcherism' and 'authoritarian populism'.²¹ Thus the idea has emerged that what we have witnessed has been a transition from corporatism to authoritarian populism as regards the role played by the state in the labour process. In the light of the theoretical arguments I have discussed above, this becomes a line of thought and debate worth pursuing in order to analyse what is entailed in studying the politics of the labour process, at least as far as it involves the state. I shall therefore now consider what the concepts of corporatism and populism mean and what distinguishes them from each other, before going on to see to what extent they may be applied to the recent history of British industrial relations. Along the way it will be necessary to say something about an issue I have so far failed to address: the significance and influence of 'fractions of capital' in structuring the relationship between the labour process and the state.

There are, needless to say, a number of ways to distinguish corporatism from populism. Amongst these could be included their social bases of support, their perceived and actual sources of opposition, their consequences in practice, their implications for the structure and role of the state, and so on. What I wish to concentrate upon, however, in line with what I have argued so far, is their relationship to the politics of the labour process and industrial relations. It seems to me that corporatist and populist structures will have very different effects upon the divisions existing within and between the state, capital, and civil society, and on the role and fate of so-called 'intermediary' organisations central to the labour process

like trade unions and employers' organisations. Put bluntly, corporatism tends to enhance and underwrite the status and importance of these organisations, even if only for purposes of social control, while populism tends to undermine or minimise their significance. I say this well aware of the fact that an advanced capitalist society would usually be characterised by an organised civil society, which in its 'normal' form would stand somewhere between the pressure-group apologetics of pluralism and the mass-society nightmares of elite theory. Here, therefore, it is necessary to distinguish between both the intention of a political strategy for the labour process and its outcome, its effects at the workplace and indeed in the wider society which may not necessarily be consistent, and the ideological pretensions of such a strategy and its practical consequences which, needless to say, will almost inevitably diverge. In the present context, I shall be discussing the corporatist and populist politics of industrial relations in terms of the former rather than the latter – that is, in terms of their strategic intentions and ideological pretensions. This does not mean that I am unaware of the difficulties which taking these features entails. Some of these will, of course, emerge below when I turn to consider the practical outcomes and consequences of these ideological strategies for the social and political control of the labour process.

It is a much-remarked-upon and a by now accepted facet of corporatism that it involves the organisation of political interests – usually and fundamentally, but not exclusively class interests – in the form of corporate groups, normally with a formal or informal stamp of approval from the state. These groups are said to have a clear hierarchical structure, to be able or willing to swap internal discipline for the benefits of being 'socially responsible' and consulted on relevant policy, legislative and administrative matters by the state, and to be integrated into a well-defined and regulated system of corporate representation. The main political function of corporate groups is to represent and discipline their members: the interests of the latter are represented to – and sometimes within – the state, and are thereby controlled in the interests of the state. Control is commonly more important than representation, but there is no necessary reason why a corporatist system should not be able to manage and contain the tension between the two. Corporatism offers some kind of organised 'intermediation' or 'organic links' between the individual and the state, though this institutional expression of integration and representation through organisation and discipline

has to take second place to the constraints of the wider role of the state and the limits of capital accumulation. Accordingly, in so far as corporatism may be said to be characterised as the organisation of economic interests politically *vis-à-vis* the state – that is to say, it can equally be construed as a type of class formation – it may be thought of as a threat to the institutional separation between economy and state to be found in capitalist societies.²²

Corporatism, when viewed as a political strategy designed to restructure both the mode of state ‘intervention’ and the form of interest representation, is best conceived of – at least in the British context – as a response to a particular type of crisis, one in which a well-organised and combative working-class movement disrupts, if not challenges, managerial rights and prerogatives and begins to push up wages when capital accumulation is stagnating and state intervention is increasing in order to augment the process of economic growth but failing to do so. Corporatism is also more likely to become a strategic option when the established institutional separation between the economy and the state is being eroded by the state’s continual ‘intervention’ in the accumulation process, for it is one way of providing a new means whereby this effect can be contained. Corporatism attempts to integrate the capitalist economy with the state, albeit in a depoliticised manner, through the very act of organising political interests, trying to foster class consensus and harmony, and carving out identifiable niches for corporate interests in the political hierarchy, becoming as a result the most used and most legitimate way of translating economic demands into political outcomes. Corporatism is thus explicable as a response to the crises generated by an era of social democracy – inefficient state intervention, insufficient economic growth, and a high incidence of industrial conflict – or at least a perceived problem to do with the breakdown of the prevailing order in industrial relations.²³

The consequences of corporatism – what happens to it, what its effects and aftermath are likely to be – have to be seen as problematic, even if corporatism fails to be institutionalised in an effective and sustained form. Corporatism in the British context has provided too many hostages to fortune. It has the potential to introduce a massively expanded role for the state which can be perceived as a threat to the power and resources of private capital. It can allow organised interest groups to become accustomed to their seats at the council of the state and to exact money from the state budget, but it can in no way guarantee that these groups deliver their side of the

bargain in terms of a better-policed, more orderly and restrained civil society. Corporatism contains the potential to break down even the institutional separation between the economy and the state by establishing organised links between the two – corporate interest groups, state agencies and so on – thereby permitting this to become a persistent feature of capitalist development in Britain. Moreover, corporatism has little obvious relevance for the specific details of how to restructure the accumulation process – apart, that is, from its promise to control class and other types of social conflict. Corporatism is really centrally concerned with the tasks of political management and interest representation and, unlike the ‘free-market’ forces of a liberal capitalist economy, it need have no specific or determinable effect upon the economy and the structure of its fortunes; it contains no precise brief for the restructuring of capital.

In this sense neither, of course, does populism. But it has, arguably, very different implications for the organisation of political interests, and distinct sets of conditions, origins, and effects or consequences which make its emergence more likely than corporatism under certain determinable circumstances. Thus it might be suggested, for example, that corporatism is a more likely possibility under the conditions of a mature social democracy and relative affluence, while populism is more likely to emerge under conditions of a burgeoning right-wing Toryism and relative and incipient austerity. The very acceptance and growth of legitimately organised political interests in capitalist societies is, in part, dependent upon the material conditions which permit groups to lay claims to economic benefits and enable dominant groups to make material concessions in the course of struggles and their resolutions. In so far as this material margin of error comes to be restricted and leaves less scope for concessions, the organisation of political interests can come to be questioned and challenged. As Przeworski has argued, workers consent to capitalism not just because they are told to, not just because they are taught to, not just because of the psychic gratification they receive, but because they can – and believe they can – get some material benefits out of it and because they feel they are more likely to be able to do this under capitalism than under any other economic or social system.²⁴ While I am not trying to put forward a reductionist case here, it can still be suggested that continued economic decline, combined with a severe world recession and the persistent failure of successive governments to perform the ‘economic miracle’, has placed constraints upon the ways in which interests can

be politically organised and legitimated. This is where populism becomes important.²⁵

Populism may be regarded as both a strategy and an ideology whereby the state tries to integrate class and other social interests when working-class collective organisations have been weakened or are under threat. Populism may be seen as one manifestation of the politics of decline, the ideology of recession. Its emergence is facilitated when material conditions – high unemployment, low levels of accumulation, world recession – have worked to undermine the economic bargaining power of key groups of workers, and so weaken their power in distributional struggles over wages and in putting leverage upon the state and government policies. Populism can become the politics of an exhausted social democracy.

Populism likewise has repercussions upon the organisation of political and class interests which are distinct from those which derive from corporatism, since its intention is to limit rather than encourage this very type of organisation. Populism may not be just another reflection of the atomised mass society, but any politics – including one that is intended to restructure the labour process, one which is based above all upon its appeal to the ‘people’ – is not going to find it so easy to tolerate the existence of autonomous organisations standing between the people and the state. This applies as much to the field of industrial relations as to other more familiar examples in the sphere of political representation. While corporatism aims at controlling while formalising the organisation of political interests, populism works to control such interests by disorganising them, by trying to limit the extent to which the society is politically organised. The rhetoric of populism is to appeal to the people rather than to vested interests, and while in its practice it has to recognise and concede to the factual durability of class and other forms of organisation, its vision of itself, its ideology, compels it to obscure and to contain the intrusion of organised interests between the people and the state. It is another type of depoliticisation, but unlike corporatism it works through political disorganisation rather than corporate organisation. Thus, for example, in the field of industrial relations it will stress individual rights at the direct expense of collective rights.

Populism does not merely play down the importance of secondary or intermediary political organisations, but in so doing can guard against the reintegration of economy and state which is an ever-present consequence of corporatism. If organised interests are denied a place – at the very least in ideological terms – in the making of

state policy, then the superimposition of political demands upon economic interests, which can follow from corporatist representation, may be forestalled, if not directly prevented from becoming a problem in the first place. This means that it becomes more difficult for, say, demands upon the state for increased expenditure to be devoted to the causes of particular interests, or upon private capitalist enterprises for increased wages, to be turned into political questions concerning the authority of the state or the right of managers to manage, or of capitalists to make a decent profit.

The greatest consequential disadvantage of populism is its vacuity. In practice it is possible to appeal to all the people only by appealing to nobody in particular. No doubt specific groups do profit materially from populist regimes, but there is no recognised structure of interest bargaining, as there is with corporatism, which can act to regulate and legitimate the unequal distribution of rewards. Populism recognises the existence of capitalism only as a set of relations of domination and subordination between classes, genders, and races in its declamatory assertion of the transcendent wishes and will of the people above and beyond the mundane call or pull of these particularistic interests: the people know and only need their leaders to tell them what they know. It therefore comes face to face with the serious practical problem of dealing with these interests – interests which subvert the integrity of the people as a political reality. In the real world, ‘the people’ do not exist. What does exist is a social structure called capitalism which consists of a series of unequal, divergent and competing economic, political and cultural interests, and ‘the people’ are conjured into existence only in the face of – and as a mask for – this structure of interests. What can, of course, give – and has given – substance to populist politics – apart, that is, from unrestrained self-interest – has been nationalism, but in this respect there is little conceptual difference from corporatism since the latter has often been aligned with an ‘organic’ conception of national unity under the tutelage of a ‘benevolent’ state.

Paradoxically, as Laclau has indicated,²⁶ this can turn populism into an extremely powerful force when it conflicts with competing strategies and ideologies. It is strategically easier for political forces to unite the people against those in power – more properly speaking, those who are defined as being in power – than to unite the people in order to fulfil the purposes of those in power. The potential for finding things the people are prepared to oppose is greater than that for finding things they are prepared to support in a common cause.

This is because capitalism is not structured by the interests of the people as a whole, but by the conflicts of interest between dominant and subordinate groups contesting and compromising over the structures of labour, rewards, opportunity, and so forth.

The evident contradiction is thus – not surprisingly and somewhat common-sensically – between its theory and its practice: in theory the state appeals to and claims to represent the people, but in practice it is forced to recognise and respond to particular interests, notably those generated by the process of capital accumulation. These latter interests in their turn constrain the actions of the state and the way society is organised and reorganised, not in the name of the people but as a consequence of a series of distinct interests and struggles grounded in specific relations of power.

It is not my intention to provide an exhaustive and intense tour of the concepts of corporatism and populism. Rather, I have concentrated upon certain political factors which are highlighted by these concepts. These are important, in my view, because they may be used to illuminate a number of key changes in the recent policies and actions of the British state in the areas of industrial relations and trade-union reform, in the relationship between the state and the labour process. I hope that the relevance of the concepts of corporatism and populism for the analysis of this relationship is now becoming clearer and more obvious. While, needless to say, these concepts have been discussed at the level of political strategy and political ideology, their discussion has equal relevance for the social structures in which they are implicated or to which they are applied. As far as the case in point – the labour process – is concerned, this relevance can be seen in the kinds of conflicts in the labour process which generate economic problems and these political strategies as a response, as well as in such changes as to whether the labour process is individualised or collectivised, whether its interests groups are organised or disorganised, and in the political and economic effects and contradictions arising from the impact of corporatism and populism upon the labour process and the state. Before taking this argument further, however, I shall now turn to the other related theme of this chapter: the relationship between so-called ‘fractions of capital’ and the industrial-relations strategies of the state.

CAPITAL AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS

The sociological character of 'fractions of capital' – that is, those groups who own and control the means of producing and distributing wealth in capitalist societies – may be identified in a number of different ways. There are, in the main, four sets of distinctions in terms of which fractions of capital can be understood:

- (1) The accumulation dimension – the position occupied in the circuit of capital or the form of capital controlled: for example, money, productive or commercial capital;
- (2) The control dimension – the extent to which a particular capital, due to its form, controls its external environment – for example, markets, prices, suppliers, finance, and so on – without complete control being possible: for example, monopoly or competitive or petit-bourgeois capital;
- (3) The size dimension – the scale of the business operated by a particular capital in terms of such things as output, sales, capital and labour employed, and so on: for example, monopoly or petit-bourgeois capital;
- (4) The spatial dimension – the location of the sites or places occupied by particular capitals: the distinction between local, national, and international capital.

I have used this set of distinctions – albeit construed in a less systematic manner – in order to examine the relationship between fractions of capital, their strategies for industrial-relations reform, and the course of state policy in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s.²⁷ Let me briefly recapitulate that argument here, not only because it can serve to illustrate the general points I wish to make in this chapter but also because the period I looked at was marked by a number of abortive attempts to restructure industrial relations in a corporatist direction. This, in its turn, will allow me to assess the significance of the populism which could be said to have started to creep into state policy and legislation after 1979.

I have argued, of the period in question, that there was running through it an important strand of corporatist politics which tried to use trade unions as agencies of social control and elicited the support of domestic-based monopoly capital in manufacturing industry. I shall therefore summarise this policy first before looking at the interests and objectives of different fractions of capital.

The corporatist drift in state policy has generally consisted of a tendency to try to undermine the organisational autonomy of trade unions, either by making them legally responsible for the actions of their members (strikes, picketing, etc.), as with the Industrial Relations Act 1971, or by making their rights, their organisational capacity, dependent upon government legislation rather than their own structural power, as with the Employment Protection Act 1975. There have been two major sides to this process: an expanded role for the state in industrial relations and an attempt to make trade unions creatures of the state, working to shift their organisational base from their grass-roots membership to the legal guarantees of the state. This process – or perhaps more correctly, these processes – has in turn served to underline the key role of trade unions in mediating between their members and the state in any corporatist system, articulating the interests of the former within the scope of the control and power exercised by the latter. Equally, it has been expressed in a number of distinct ways. If policies and legislation like ‘In Place of Strife’ (1969), the Industrial Relations Act (1971) and the Employment Protection Act (1975) are taken as examples, the ways in which it has been expressed can be said to have included: imposing fines on unofficial strikers so as to encourage trade unions to take responsibility for the actions of their members; tolerating the closed shop in the interests of sustaining orderly industrial relations; making trade-union recognition a matter of government investigation and approval; introducing ‘cooling-off periods’ and secret ballots so as to wrest the initiative for strikes away from rank-and-file workers and place it more firmly within the grasp of trade-union officials. These and other moves have attempted to undermine the organisational autonomy of trade unions, while building up their capacity to play a regulatory role in ordering industrial relations. It is not a story I can go into here, but suffice it to say that these efforts have, in the past, usually come to grief because of organised – if very sectional – working-class opposition and the state’s reluctance to veer too far from the consensus politics of ‘social democracy’.

However, corporatism has also failed because of the political and ideological opposition of capital. As I have argued elsewhere, domestic-based monopoly capital in manufacturing industry was the most likely to support corporatism as a way of reforming industrial relations in Britain, though even here there was still more than a residual commitment to liberalism or voluntarism. This was most notable in the objectives of the Confederation of British Industry

(CBI), which either fostered or supported a number of corporatist aims embodied in state policy and legislation. Neither the CBI nor government, however, was prepared to accept the consequences of an expanded role for the state in industrial relations. One of the almost inevitable results of the corporatist reform of trade unions would have been to make the state, rather than employers and management, directly responsible for the prosecution and punishment of strikers and trade-union leaders. Thus this situation was not pursued to its logical conclusion for a whole variety of reasons, some of which are: the potential erosion of the domination of private capital over the labour process in favour of the state; the emergence of a widespread and potentially political opposition amongst some of the most powerful sections of the organised working class; the fear of detailed, routine and pervasive state involvement in the day-to-day workings of industrial relations; the possible questioning of the impartiality of the state that could ensue; and an entrenched and widely shared preference for the ideology of liberalism or voluntarism as the rhetoric for legitimate relations between workers and managers. In the end, corporatism failed because no agency was powerful or willing enough to enable it to emerge.

Nor were the other identifiable fractions of capital likely to find corporatism congenial to their own interests. What I have termed petit-bourgeois capital – that is, small-scale capital deployed most usually on a local basis within highly competitive market structures – has clearly and consistently opposed the ‘statist’ implications of corporatism. This has been in keeping with its long-standing ideological hostility towards state intervention of any kind. Needless to say, however, as with all social interests, this hostility has in practice been somewhat selective. Petit-bourgeois capital has not, on the whole, extended its opposition to the coercive intervention of the law and has been prepared to accept this as a means of managing trade unions and controlling strikes, while trying to ensure at the same time that this means of legal coercion to guarantee order in industrial relations remains part and parcel of the authority and power of the employers rather than being devolved to the state.

This strategy, a set of ideological beliefs about practice within the labour process – namely heteronomy for trade-union organisation combined with a liberal as opposed to an interventionist role for the state, which I have chosen to call ‘paternalism’ – has been equally characteristic of the set of interests associated with money or financial capital operating within the UK economy. Both its own structure of

industrial relations and the general interest of capital in pacifying industrial conflict have led what is termed 'the City of London' to support the view that a highly circumscribed, regulated and dependent role for trade unions is the most practicable, if not the most desirable, way of managing the labour process. Given its own crucial role in financing the world economy free from domestic constraints, and the liberalised conditions required for financial business to be attracted to 'the City', this fraction of capital has similarly been averse to the detailed interventions and bargaining restraints of the corporate state.

This, I argued, was likewise true of multinational capital as a whole (though more of foreign rather than domestic-based corporations) in that the global scope of its operation both depended upon and facilitated a liberal and open, as opposed to a restrictive and regulatory, role for the state. Such capital was not, however, necessarily in favour of a highly controlled role for trade unions, particularly as far as its own industrial relations were concerned, tending not to follow the pattern laid down for trade unions by both corporatism and paternalism. Instead, it at least paid lip service to the idea of developing an autonomous role for trade unions in so far as this could be met effectively by wage concessions, productivity deals, market conditions, and superior management techniques. Trade unions also had to be respected for the sake of peace in industrial relations. This was a strategy which I called liberalism.

Up to 1979 this was roughly the picture as I saw it, though it could be speculated very tentatively that the general need for a workable restructuring of industrial relations in the wake of increasing industrial conflict, a string of economic crises, and a rapidly worsening world recession may have begun to promote, within the ranks of capital, a reluctant consensus on the virtues of corporatism. It can be argued that since 1979 we have been in a new situation, and I want to bring the preceding themes together in order to consider this new phase. In this section I have tried to show how the interests of capital in managing the labour process entail a definite – if differing – politics which links employers' control with the role of the state. I now wish to consider whether corporatism has given way to populism, and how this can be related to the interests of fractions of capital and to the politics of the labour process. But first a few words need to be said about the period immediately preceding the election of a Conservative government in 1979.

CORPORATISM AT THE WORKPLACE

The last Labour government's period in office witnessed – amongst other things, of course – the relatively successful incorporation and bureaucratisation of the so-called 'shop stewards' movement'. It also became implicated in the exhaustion of corporatism as a political strategy. These two points raise the interesting question of how experiments with corporatism may have formed a precondition for the effectiveness of the Thatcher government's intervention in industrial relations. It has been suggested by some recent research that one important undercurrent in the modern history of British industrial relations has been the acceptance and integration by management of shop-floor leadership and work-group bargaining into the structure of company-level collective bargaining, especially since the early 1970s.²⁸ The point here is that while corporatism failed to find an adequate institutional mode of centralisation within the state, the process its introduction initiated led to changes at the grass-roots level in industry which derived from the corporatist experience. While these changes cannot properly be called 'corporatist', since they have commonly been carried out independently of the state, they have still furthered the process of working-class incorporation. Moreover, they tried to deal with the shop-floor/work-group power base which was one of the sources of the escalating industrial conflict experienced in the 1960s and 1970s by co-opting its leadership and by legitimising collective bargaining at shop-floor level. Whatever the precise motives for this, and whatever its extent, it represents an important departure from the 1960s – one with significant implications for the late 1970s.

The other consequence of the last Labour government's period in office which needs to be remarked upon here is how it demonstrated very graphically the limitations of corporatism in a British context. During this time efforts were made to try to ensure that the rights of trade unions became dependent upon the state. The trade-union movement acquiesced with the guidelines set down by successive incomes policies for almost a three-year period, under the watchful eye of the TUC and faced with the back-up threat of sanctions imposed by the state if such policies failed. This degree of 'agreement' was conceded in return for the promise of government implementation of a number of trade-union demands including legislation on the introduction of industrial democracy, greater redistribution of

wealth, and more trade-union involvement in government policy-making. As is well known, this exercise was undermined by the failure of the government to keep its promises, the eventual militant opposition of groups of rank-and-file workers to incomes policies, and the fact that capital was not prepared to enter into a partnership with the state to superintend the rationalisation of British industry, and instead maintained an open hostility to what it saw as the pro-trade-union bias in the Labour government's legislation.²⁹

What, then, are the implications of these processes for the establishment of corporatism in British industrial relations? I think they imply that corporatism lacks an adequate social base, a structural focus of support, in order to be effective as a politics of the labour process, as a mode of economic intervention by the state, and as a form of representing political interests. Precisely why this should be so is not something I can go into here, but it can be argued that the inability of corporatism to attract a stable and successful series of class and political alliances, not only amongst fractions of capital but also between working-class 'fractions' and other political groupings, has been one leading factor in the state's break with the social democratic past and in opening up British politics to new hegemonic strategies. The exhaustion of corporatism, as I have referred to it, is thus one occasion for the emergence of populism.

This does not mean, however, that corporatism has gone away for ever, or that it has lost all its relevance. Some of the aims and ambitions of the corporatist experiment have been retained. It may be claimed that facilitating, if only by default, the localised incorporation of shop stewards and workplace bargaining has led to the relative decline in rank-and-file power and thus to the decline in industrial conflict – in combination, of course, with the increasing severity of the world recession and the draconian industrial discipline exerted by massive levels of unemployment. There has not, therefore, been simply a trend away from corporatism and towards populism. In order to determine this complexity I now wish to discuss the Conservative government's industrial-relations policy since 1979, more with a view to outlining the general features of populism as a form of state involvement within the labour process than presenting a detailed history of the period. I shall do this in three ways: first I shall try to relate, very briefly, the key changes which have taken place since 1979; then I shall analyse how these changes are bound up with the evolving interests of fractions of capital; lastly, I shall assess the corporatist and populist elements in the changes and interests exam-

ined in order to emphasise the degree of populism to be found in the recent restructuring of industrial relations – in, that is, the new politics of the labour process associated with the role assigned to the state by ‘Thatcherism’. Given this chapter’s overall concern with the analysis of the relationship between the labour process and the state, this last section should serve as a fitting conclusion.

POPULISM AND INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS STRATEGIES SINCE 1979

For my purpose in this chapter it is not necessary for me to give a detailed, chronological history of what has happened since 1979, but it is none the less essential to outline summarily some key landmarks in industrial-relations policy and legislation since the Conservatives were returned to government under the leadership of Margaret Thatcher. I shall also discuss this government’s legislative reforms, well aware of the fact that many other state actions, like public-expenditure cuts and public-sector incomes policies, are just as important for an adequate analysis of the relationship between the labour process and the state. It is just that I feel that the points I wish to make about populism as a ‘politics for industrial relations’ can at least be adequately illustrated by the strategies and legislation I shall discuss.

We can take as our first example the Employment Act 1980 which entailed and implied the following objectives: the provision of state funds for secret ballots within trade unions on the election of union officials and strikes, thereby embodying the potential for greater state supervision of union rule books and activities; restrictions on the closed shop which can work to weaken union organisation on the shop floor, increase managerial authority, and encourage greater labour mobility; confining legal picketing to workers picketing their own place of work and curbing ‘sympathy’ strikes in order to combat the ‘flying’ and ‘mass’ picketing tactics which came into increasing use in the early 1970s and to guard against the effect of secondary picketing which could contain or trouble the power of capital in view of its integrated and multi-plant structure. The Employment Act 1982 strengthened some of these provisions, notably those concerning the closed shops and secondary industrial action. It augmented the compensation for workers dismissed because of their refusal to join a closed shop, directly opened up trade-union funds to legal actions for

damages, and facilitated the selective dismissal of strikers. It made unlawful both strikes against non-unionised companies and clauses in contracts and tenders which prohibited the employment of non-unionised labour, and it redefined a trade dispute so as to exclude from the definition, and thus from legal immunity, political and internationally based strikes (for example, against multinationals), inter-union disputes, and secondary industrial action.

Needless to say, these acts can become meaningful only when set in some kind of interpretative context, as I shall try to show below, but it is important to note that they have been followed by further policy proposals which are equally indicative of the analytical issues I wish to raise. Early in 1983 the government published a Green Paper entitled 'Democracy in the Trade Unions'. This has formed the basis for projected trade-union reforms. These and other proposals have made it clear that the overall thrust of the policy is grounded in the opinion that trade unions and their leaders act in ways which are contrary to the interests of their members. The government's idea here is that militant trade-union leaders often wilfully ignore the moderate wishes and demands of their members, a silent majority whose silence is a consequence of the absence of democracy within the trade-union movement. A major stated aim in Conservative policy – particularly in the ideological rhetoric which has surrounded its presentation – has been to represent, to reach out to and to speak for the ordinary individual members of trade unions by controlling the power of trade-union leaders and by weakening the organisational structure of trade unions themselves.

The Green Paper thus proposed that union executives be elected by secret ballot. It stated that strikes could not be called without a secret ballot being taken first, presumably in the belief that workers do not normally want to strike, and if given the opportunity to say so, they would go against the wishes of their more militant leaders who are willing to strike at every opportune moment. This has subsequently been linked to the aim of making trade unions liable for the damages incurred during a strike if a secret ballot has not been administered first. The last part of the Green Paper focused upon the political funds of trade unions, the pool of regular donations from which they finance their political activities, like supporting the Labour Party and fighting against government legislation which they consider contrary to the interests of their members. Here we can find another example of the attempt to 'reach out to' the individual trade-union member by proposing that he or she should now have the

right to 'contract in' to donate contributions to the political fund rather than having to contract out by signing a form to that effect.

If, for the sake of brevity, we rest content with these examples – especially since I am concerned with illustrating types of industrial-relations politics rather than trying to see into the future (look, for example, at what happened to the corporatism debate) – then I think we can see the practical consequences of Tory populism. It is manifest as a process of struggle in policy proposals and statutes like: trying to make trade unions liable for damages arising from strike action unless a secret ballot has taken place first (in unofficial strikes the workers themselves will be liable); placing responsibility for taking legal action with the employer, with penalties being confined to civil law; ensuring that senior trade-union officials are elected by secret ballot; and trying to make contracting in as opposed to contracting out the lawful way of contributing to the political funds of trade unions, the funds themselves being made subject to periodic ballots as to their desirability in the eyes of trade-union members. Such measures are designed, according to Mrs Thatcher, 'to ensure that the ballot box and not the bully boy shall prevail'. They are part of Norman Tebbit's 'mission' to 'give the unions back to their members'. They are rooted in a claim to speak for, and appeal to, the individual union member as an individual and as one of 'the people', rather than as a member of any collectivity which intercedes between the individual and 'the people' on the one hand, and the state on the other. They also represent a significant break with the process of strengthening trade-union organisation for the purpose of social control which had been so marked a feature of the corporatist experiment in British industrial relations.

POPULISM AND CAPITAL

A number of the specific reforms of industrial relations mentioned above were either proposed or supported by important sections of capital during the 1970s. Populism very easily became an ideological creed of capital – if not in its fine detail, at least in its grand design – in marked contrast to its unease about corporatism.³⁰ It is interesting, for example, how at CBI conferences the secret ballot was canvassed as the cure for all the then known illnesses in British industrial relations in the wake of what was seen as the failure of the Heath government's Industrial Relations Act. This perceived failure also lay

behind a growing emphasis on the need for more and stronger employer initiatives and solidarity with respect to the structuring of the relationship between the state and the labour process. Equally, the grudgingly conceded tolerance for the closed shop was increasingly weakened by populist grass-roots opposition within the CBI itself, voiced particularly – but not solely – by petit-bourgeois capital. This was combined with the continuation of an implacable hostility towards the immunities in law acquired by the trade unions, and a persistent stress upon the need to find more effective methods to combat picketing and secondary industrial action.

It must be said that not all fractions of capital have been affected by industrial conflict in the same way or to the same extent. Domestic-based capital in manufacturing industry can be said to have been most systematically challenged by the upsurge in industrial militancy, and hence at that point in time most open to the appeal of corporatism, until it became very clear that it was not going to work. Money capital, though it has been confronted with demands for recognition from white-collar trade unions, has at the same time been cushioned by its structure of paternalism, which has equally served to protect petit-bourgeois capital, albeit to a lesser degree in view of the latter's greater vulnerability to the effects of strikes and other forms of industrial conflict occurring in other sectors of industry. Multi-national capital, while similarly threatened, has been able to rely on the international scope of its operations to deal with trade unions. However, things have begun to change.

There are two conditions which, it could be argued, have increasingly influenced the fortunes of capital since 1979, both of which are aspects of the contemporary restructuring of capital: bankruptcy and internationalisation.³¹ The world recession, government policy, and economic rationalisation have meant that one of the major ways restructuring has taken place has been through a massive shake-out of capital, and this has been manifest in a phenomenal escalation in the rate of bankruptcies. At the same time, capital has been internationalised even further by the global spread of the capitalist division of labour, the transfer of industrial production by major Western corporations to the 'Third World', and the rise in overseas investment. Therefore not all fractions of capital have done equally well out of the present phase of restructuring: arguably, for example, domestic-based capital, whether it is large or small, has fared worse than international manufacturing and financial capital. But despite this I want to argue, very speculatively, that more recently, in line

with and partly as a result of the election of radical Conservative governments, capital has come to be characterised by a higher degree of ideological and strategic unity. This has found expression in the elaboration and acceptance of an authoritarian populist ideology.

No doubt there have been clear signs of dissatisfaction on the part of business with the Thatcher government's record: recall the not infrequent rumblings of discontent within the CBI about such things as the general drift of economic policy, the severe plight of certain sectors of business, excessively high interest rates, the inflated value of sterling, and the need to maintain 'productive' capital expenditure in both the public and private sectors. But these reservations and criticisms have not been taken very far by employers, and do not appear to have led to any severe splits within the ranks of capital or to any serious rifts between the latter and the Thatcher governments.

The election of a Conservative government is usually welcomed by business, since it is thought that this will provide the right climate in which to get on with the important job of making money. The initial election of the Thatcher government and its successive terms in office have tended to confirm and entrench this belief. It is important sources of opinion within capital as well as the state which think that 'Thatcherism' is the only alternative, the only way in which social and economic problems will be resolved. Capital now has a government which it thinks is on the right lines, and as a result, significant differences of opinion and interests should not and need not arise. What has therefore been set in train by populism is an impetus towards ideological conformity and unity, a consensus of sentiment and faith over the general direction of state policy and 'intervention'.

This overall process has been defined by the emergence of populism. Obviously, one reason for the increasing ideological consensus on the part of capital is the lack of alternatives: even if the Thatcher government continues to fail, the consequence is likely to be a further growth in the internationalisation of capital and a strengthening of the trend towards populism – processes which are bound up with Thatcherism anyway. But more to the point, if my speculations have any validity they are indicative of differences between corporatism and populism for the interests of capital which call for some comment. It is possible to argue that corporatism, as a means of restructuring both the relationship between the state and the labour process and the organisation of industrial relations, was available as a realistic strategy only to certain types of capital. These included not only those which required it because of the crises in their industrial

relations, but also large companies with well-unionised and organised workforces and with the resources and time to develop expertise in industrial-relations management, in personnel management, and in concessionary collective bargaining with trade unions. Along with this, it was also more feasible for these companies to enter into an effective corporate partnership, and workable if contested bargains, with the state. Petit-bourgeois capital has lacked the leverage, let alone the inclination or the organisation to accommodate corporatism in its industrial relations, and both international and money capital have opposed the more directive and interventionist facets of the corporate state. In terms of the structure and ideology of capital in Britain, corporatism has yet to be widely endorsed as a means of restructuring social relations in industry and between industry and the state.

Populist ideology and the radical conservatism of the Conservative government's economic role are more congenial to the interests and ideology of capital. Populism is admittedly vacuous as a way of legitimating class relations or of appeasing interest groups, but this is a strength as well as a weakness. Populism's potential to become a workable political strategy is greatly enhanced when trade-union organisation has been threatened and put further on the defensive by mass unemployment, the severity of the world recession, the relative and temporary erosion of the strike weapon, the incorporation of shop-steward organisation and other levels of union leadership, and the exhaustion of social democratic politics. These factors alone question any claims corporatism could have as a realistic strategy, since trade unions can no longer – if indeed they ever could – deliver the compliance of their members and the wholehearted endorsement of their leaders. Capital is now no longer so reliant on securing the co-operation of trade unions in order to ensure that the labour process runs smoothly; and the very restructuring that this process has been undergoing has tended, in turn, to make such co-operation more likely.

The character of this kind of conjuncture equally indicates that strategies which do not depend upon the acquiescence and support of the trade-union movement become more realistic and appropriate for the purposes of reforming industrial relations, and the very abstractness and lack of precision in the rhetoric, appeal, and implications of populism mean that it is capable of receiving the support of wider sections of capital. Populism entails less of a commitment on the part of capital than corporatism does; it involves fewer concessions to

trade unions and represents a move away from the constructions of compromises in the labour process, at least in so far as this process is materially structured by ideologies: and, unlike corporatism, it promises to be a way of denying the importance of class in liberal-bourgeois ideology. Of course, it almost goes without saying that things will not work out like this in practice. Apart from anything else, while capital may be undergoing a phase of ideological and strategic accord, as we have seen, the process of economic reorganisation is having divisive effects. However, the relative weakening of trade unionism, together with the widespread rationalisation and internationalisation of capital, have made capital more ready and willing to embrace populism as the most appropriate way by which industrial relations can be reformed, the relation between the state and the labour process transformed, and these set of changes ideologically legitimated. If this is indeed the case, then how has populism been manifest in the recent policy and legislation produced by Conservative governments which, intentionally or unintentionally, have these potential effects? In conclusion, I shall consider this problem.

THE EMERGENCE OF POPULISM

In an earlier section of this chapter I tried to distinguish corporatism from populism as distinct politics of the labour process. In view of this concern, I argued that one of the principal ways in which they were different involved the role they ascribed to interest representation: with corporatism, organisations like trade unions play a representative and regulatory role in structuring and mediating the relationship between their members and the state, while populism tends to minimise – if not preclude altogether – such organisations, guarding against their intervention between the individual and the state: instead, the state uses its power in an authoritative and authoritarian manner on behalf of ‘the people’, rather than for the purpose of securing an orderly consensus between specialised interest groups. With populism, only the state can have the political authority to regulate interests and it claims to do so in the interest of ‘the people’ as a whole; with corporatism, political authority is delegated and the particularity of interests is recognised. These distinct politics can thus have very different effects on the labour process and industrial relations.

Although it is a considerable simplification of the issues I have been discussing it is still possible to identify the trends I have indicated in state policy and legislation. Without undue exaggeration, it may be argued that nascent expressions of populism can be detected, even though its traces are by no means unambiguous or without contradiction. It may be conceded that elements of corporatism can still be found in the reforms proposed and administered by Conservative governments, not only in the continuation of an expanded and coercive role for the state – this would also be consistent with the authoritarian cast of populism – but also in the attempt to foster a strong and responsible trade unionism as one way of ensuring industrial order. Witness, for example, the imposition of fines on union executives to encourage them to exert more control over the use of the strike weapon, picketing, and secondary industrial action by their members.

It is, however, equally possible to spot trends which, far from being liberal in their toleration of trade-union organisation, try to circumvent it or reduce its influence by appealing to union members, and by constituting them as individuals rather than as members of collective organisations. Their aim has been to represent trade-union members as individuals and as ‘the people’ in defiance of the claims of trade unions for collective solidarity. I have in mind here two examples: the closed shop and the secret ballot.

There has been a suppressed and unspoken but persistent belief in the orderly virtues of the closed shop on the part of many employers and some state managers. Rarely open to full debate, this belief has derived from the closed shop’s functions of providing order and stability in collective-bargaining arrangements and of guaranteeing that the unions involved in closed-shop agreements are truly representative of the workforce. Despite the concession to liberalism afforded by the proscription of the closed shop in the Industrial Relations Act 1971 – and even here its legitimate alternative, the agency shop, received endorsement as a result – the closed shop itself has been conceived of by sections of capital and the state in corporatist terms. The Thatcher governments have not introduced an outright ban on the closed shop. However, by raising the levels of individual compensation for dismissal for refusing to join a closed shop, by raising the percentage majority required in elections held on whether to form or to continue a closed shop, by increasing the frequency of these elections and by generally making it more difficult for closed shops to operate, it has sought to undermine their potential

for control, their capacity to secure their recognition of trade unions, and their legitimate role in collective bargaining. Collective regulation, in statute at least, is being replaced by individual recalcitrance and populist fragmentation. Legislative constraints upon the closed shop, though they have to be activated by the employer, seek to atomise rather than pluralise industrial relations, reducing the points of organised and collective resistance within the labour process. Thus control can be secured within the labour process by fragmentation and individualisation as opposed to organisation and collectivisation.

In terms of abstract principle there is little wrong with secret ballots, although in a properly democratic system perhaps people ought to be able to defend publicly their choices and decisions. In terms of the actual use of secret ballots in practice, however, a less dogmatic assessment has to be made. The introduction of secret ballots in recent policy and legislation on industrial relations has made the principle a far from innocent one. The provisions for secret ballots – be they postal ballots on the election of union officials or workplace ballots on the question of strike action – serve to define the trade-union member as an individual with no particular ties or loyalties to an organised set of interests. The trade-union member becomes more like a domestic consumer than an involved and responsible member of a work-based collectivity; he or she is located as one of ‘the people’ and thus placed away from the origin of the grievance, the focus of the decision, and the source of information about the decision – the workplace and the trade union. Since information about the cause and the decision at issue is not controlled equally and is not free and equally available to everybody as a result of such things as managerial control of knowledge or the specific experience of instances of work deprivation, and since the sources of information (mainly the media, whose output would become crucial with the introduction and proliferation of secret ballots) do not represent, reflect and respect, equally and fairly, all sections of interest and opinion, the conditions under which secret ballots are to be administered, and on which issues, turn out to be of key political significance. The introduction of government-financed secret ballots, within the wider ramifications of populism, has the potential to define union members as privatised individuals, divorced from organised representation at the workplace and from the solidarities which can serve to mitigate and alleviate the exploitation and grievances continually being generated by the labour process. The stress upon secret ballots can thus be read as one possible indication of the

emergence of populism in the state's recent efforts to restructure industrial relations and social relations within the labour process in Britain. It is precisely these developments which make the analysis of the politics of the labour process so important.

Notes

1. See H. Braverman, *Labour and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). The critical literature on Braverman is now massive. For one extended summation of the debate see P. Thompson, *The Nature of Work: An Introduction to Debates on the Labour Process* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
2. For Braverman's discussion of the 'new middle class' and of the role of gender in the labour process, see op. cit., pp. 341-7, 353-5, and ch. 18.
3. For Braverman's discussion of the state see *ibid.*, ch. 14, which is six pages long. See also P. Baran and P. Sweezy, *Monopoly Capital* (Hardmondsworth: Penguin, 1965).
4. See, for example, T. Elger, 'Valorisation and Deskilling', *Capital and Class*, 7 (Spring 1979): 60-1 and *passim*.
5. This literature is now likewise massive. For useful summary discussions see, for example, M. Carnoy, *The State and Political Theory* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), B. Frankel, *Beyond the State?* (London: Macmillan, 1983).
6. See, for example, N. Poulantzas, *Fascism and Dictatorship* (London: New Left Books, 1974); B. Jessop, 'Corporatism, Fascism and Social Democracy', in P. Schmitter and G. Lehmbruch (eds), *Trends Towards Corporatist Intermediation* (London and Beverly Hills: Sage, 1979).
7. For one example of this see C. Littler and G. Salaman, *Class at Work* (London: Batsford, 1984) pp. 43-7.
8. For leading examples of the literature on corporatism see, for example, C. Crouch, 'The State, Capital, and Liberal Democracy', in Crouch (ed.), *State and Economy in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Croom Helm, 1979); B. Jessop (1979), op. cit.; L. Panitch, 'Recent Theorisations of Corporatism: Reflections on a Growth Industry', *British Journal of Sociology*, 2 (1980): 159-87; P. Schmitter, 'Still the Century of Corporatism', *Review of Politics*, vol. 36 (1974) no. 1). For a leading example of the literature on 'Thatcherism' see S. Hall and M. Jacques (eds), *The Politics of Thatcherism* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1983).
9. Consider, for example, how the labour process debate was pursued in the journal *Capital and Class*. See the Brighton Labour Process Group, 'The Capitalist Labour Process', *Capital and Class*, 1 (Spring 1977); T. Elger (1979), op. cit., and subsequent issues of the journal.
10. For Burawoy's work and arguments see M. Burawoy: 'Toward a Marxist Theory of the Labour Process', *Politics and Society*, vol. 8 (1978) nos 3-4; *Manufacturing Consent* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979); *The Politics of Production* (London: Verso, 1985).

11. See note 3 above.
12. See C. Littler and G. Salaman (1984), *op. cit.*
13. See C. Littler and G. Salaman, 'Bravermania and Beyond: Recent Theories of the Labour Process', *Sociology*, vol. 16 (1981) no. 2.
14. T. Elger (1979), *op. cit.*, pp. 60, 61.
15. C. Littler and G. Salaman (1982), *op. cit.*, p. 266. See also pp. 260 and 264-5.
16. M. Burawoy (1979), *op. cit.*, p. 110. See also ch. 7, *passim*.
17. See M. Burawoy (1985), *op. cit.*, especially the introduction and ch. 1.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
19. *Ibid.*
20. The most obvious example of this was J. Winkler, 'Corporatism', *European Journal of Sociology*, vol. 17 (1976) no. 1.
21. See, for example, S. Hall and M. Jacques (1983), *op. cit.*
22. For an interesting account of this institutional separation and its consequences see B. Jessop, 'The Democratic State and the National Interest', in D. Coates and G. Johnson (eds), *Socialist Arguments* (London: Martin Robertson, 1983).
23. See D. Strinati, 'State Intervention, the Economy, and the Crisis', in A. Stewart (ed.), *Contemporary Britain* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1983).
24. See A. Przeworski, *Capitalism and Social Democracy* (Cambridge University Press, 1985), especially chs 4 and 5.
25. See S. Hall and M. Jacques (1983), *op. cit.*, D. Strinati (1983), *op. cit.*; B. Jessop, 'The Transformation of the State in Post-War Britain', in R. Scase (ed.), *The State in Western Europe* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).
26. See E. Laclau, 'Towards a Theory of Populism', in Laclau (ed.), *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory* (London: New Left Books, 1977).
27. On what follows see D. Strinati, *Capitalism, the State, and Industrial Relations* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).
28. On this and what follows see R. Hyman: 'Comment', *British Journal of Sociology*, vol. 29 (1978) no. 4; *idem*, 'The Politics of Workplace Trade Unionism', *Capital and Class*, 8 (Summer 1979).
29. On the above see D. Strinati (1983), *op. cit.*
30. On this and what follows see D. Strinati (1982), *op. cit.*, especially pp. 164-5.
31. On this see B. Jessop (1980), *op. cit.*, and D. Strinati (1983), *op. cit.*

8 Gender and the Labour Process: A Reassessment

Jackie West

We have come a long way from the position fifteen or so years ago when feminism sought merely to have women recognised in a sociology of work and challenged the sexism manifested in the marginalisation of women in class analysis. An influential paradigm has emerged: that gender is integral to the organisation of work and to social production. This has tended to take the form of a twofold shift in focus. First, it is maintained that gender relations are important in their own right, for women's (or men's) place in the labour process is shaped by these relations as such and not simply by their role in the sphere of reproduction. In practice this has usually taken the form of arguing that patriarchy is as integral as class relations to women's subordinate position. But secondly there has been a shift towards the view that patriarchy is as integral as class to the explanation of capitalist production itself. These two themes, however, are not necessarily coterminous. While patriarchy is usually crucial for an understanding of the position of women and men, it does not necessarily follow that it is crucial to the development of the labour process, either specifically or as a whole.¹

Both themes have been popular with the currently fashionable critiques of Marxism. In a manner analogous to 'contingency theory', they have focused on the essential role of non-class forces (in this case patriarchy) in shaping capitalist development. And, as a prime instance of exclusionary strategies, they represent a revival of what might be called Weberian themes in social theory, especially in class and stratification analysis. Nevertheless, the focus on patriarchal practices, with its recognition of the complexity of interests and conflict, has been a very necessary counter to any oversimplistic conception of class relations at work. This has been particularly evident in the more specific debate on gender and skill. At the same time, however, this debate has tended to distract attention away from the economic and other benefits to capital of sexual divisions.

This chapter falls into three main parts. Following a brief sketch of the development of feminist theory on the labour process, it considers at some length the issue of gender and skill. Although this has often been discussed, it is clear that feminist and more orthodox Marxist interpretations of the debate and its 'resolution' are far from compatible (Liff, 1986; Thompson, 1983). Moreover, this issue has always been a microcosm of the wider question of the relation of gender and patriarchy to the labour process. Secondly, it discusses the idea of gendered work and in particular presents a critical appreciation of Cynthia Cockburn's work, which represents perhaps the most sustained and coherent theorisation of all these questions on the basis of several empirical studies. Thirdly, and much more conventionally, it addresses some issues around the significance of women's work in the current period, more particularly in relation to capitalist restructuring. I argue that these precisely demonstrate the very importance of gender to the labour process, but I also emphasise the political and other conditions under which this is so and more generally maintain that class relations have been underestimated in many recent analyses of gender at work.

THE FEMINIST QUESTION

In developing a critique of Marxist and non-Marxist views on the marginality of women's work, feminism initially addressed itself to the specificities of female wage labour. It sought to understand why, for example, women were drawn on rather than men or other groups in the course of deskilling, or why and to what extent women's labour power was cheaper, more flexible and/or more disposable than that of men. The explanation for women's subordination in production, epitomised in Veronica Beechey's early work, was to be found in women's actual or assumed role in the family and an associated patriarchal ideology.

The ensuing debate on women as a reserve army of labour (RAL) is well known. The difficulties of applying the concept of the RAL are legion. They include its apparent inability to explain trends in male and female employment and unemployment, particularly in recessionary periods (Bruegel, 1979; Dex and Perry, 1984). Nor can it explain the ghettoisation of women's work, and the more general principle of sex typing of jobs which cannot be reduced to economic causes and which itself can override any economic benefits of

substituting women for men (Anthias, 1980; Liff, 1986). It has been seen, therefore, as a classic case of trying to fit feminist issues into Marxist categories which were not designed for them (rather in the same way that the domestic-labour debate distorted the analysis of housework and childcare). A further theoretical handicap is that it focuses on the labour market rather than the labour process, and on the sphere of reproduction and ideology as the cause of women's disadvantaged position. In these respects it even mirrored the dominant orthodoxy in post-war social theory with its focus on the supply characteristics of women workers, their role in the family and attitudes to women's work. It is not, then, surprising that feminists, including Beechey herself (1983), have tended to reject such a framework on both empirical and theoretical grounds, and reasserted the project of exploring the interconnections of gender and class relations at the point of production.

It would be a mistake, however, to relegate the issues raised by the debate on women as an RAL to the dustbin of history. It is clear that women are not necessarily more disposable than men, and that women's overall employment position has been relatively protected in the last decade or so by the general expansion of services. But it is also clear that much employment growth has occurred in precisely the least well-organised and least well-paid sectors (Rubery and Tarling, 1982) and that it is women's part-time work (which is especially volatile) which has particularly expanded, often at the cost of full-time work for both women and men. These developments will be addressed at the end of the chapter.

Nevertheless, it was undoubtedly Heidi Hartmann's work (1976, 1979) that signalled a new tack in analysing the articulation of class and gender relations, because she reasserted the specifically feminist project and also made sexual segregation and the processes creating it the central issues in the study of paid work. Just as the debate on domestic labour had been criticised for examining its benefits to capital but ignoring those it confers on men, Hartmann argued that job segregation by sex could be explained only by reference to the patriarchal practices of men. While the capital-labour logic could explain the process of deskilling and hierarchy in production, it could not account for why women rather than men were concentrated in deskilled, low-paid work at the bottom of this hierarchy. Moreover, by patriarchy she meant not simply an ideology legitimising the status quo but an institutionalised system for the control of female labour, operating in the interests of men – ordinary men, men as workers.

She therefore attributed agency to men as such, and represented patriarchy as a material practice. In so doing she attributed particular significance to the way in which male trade unionists, along with capital, have excluded women from skilled work or the labour market in the name of the family wage or 'protection'. The debate about patriarchy 'versus' reproduction as the main cause of the sexual division of labour continues (Brenner and Ramas, 1984; Lewis, 1985), but Hartmann's thesis itself did not fundamentally alter the terms of the general debate on class and gender because it accepted the view that the processes creating places in the division of labour are quite separate from the processes of allocation. This dualism on the partnership of capitalism and patriarchy has in recent years been resoundingly challenged.

There have been two especially influential attempts to develop what might be called an integrationist approach to the relation of gender to the labour process. To begin with, Ann Phillips and Barbara Taylor, one of whose starting points was a commitment to Marxism, argued that worker resistance to deskilling is shot through with sexual politics, for the other side of its coin is the maintenance of differentials and skilled status for men. Gender struggle was seen as a key component of class struggle: 'the perpetuation of sexual hierarchy is inextricably interwoven with struggles against the real subordination [of labour] to capital' (1980: 86). A parallel development has been the argument for the construction of gender difference within production itself. A major element of this has been a critique of the view that the main site and cause of women's oppression is the family, since it cannot adequately deal with phenomena like sexual harassment or women's hesitancy in the presence of men. The absences are beautifully summed up by Cockburn (1981: 54) on 'the material of male power':

Our theories of sexual division of labour at work have tended to be an immaculate conception unsullied by [such] physical intrusions . . . the free-standing woman, the physical reality of men, their muscle or initiative, the way they wield a spanner or the spanner they wield, these things have been diminished in our account.

Cockburn's more specific thesis on the gendered character of technology is part of a wider feminist concern with technology (Faulkner and Arnold, 1985), but its significance can be better assessed in the

light of both the strengths and weaknesses of Phillips and Taylor's position.

MEN AND SKILL

The social construction of skill has been an important theme in feminist work because it seeks precisely to challenge the received wisdom that all we must explain is why women do semi- and unskilled jobs and men do the skilled ones. It therefore seeks a more radical questioning of vertical occupational segregation.

Central to Phillips and Taylor's thesis is the proposition (1980: 79) that:

far from being an objective economic fact, skill is often an ideological category imposed on certain types of work by virtue of the sex and power of the workers who perform it . . . skill definitions are saturated with sexual bias.

Many of their points are underlined by reflecting on the fate of equality legislation in the 1970s. Male workers often sought and/or colluded with management's evasive action: the creation of *de facto* women's grades (with 'semi-skilled' women just above the level of 'unskilled' male labourers); the revision of differentials, sometimes increasing men's bonuses; the revision of job-evaluation criteria to give greater weight to the content of men's jobs. Such actions were clearly taken to compensate men for the threat posed by equal pay to their status and earnings (Snell *et al.*, 1981, esp. 20-5 and 66). Case studies make the same points more graphically, often because they have been able to juxtapose the realities of women's and men's work, alongside the rationalisations given by both men and management and also alongside the mix of acquiescence and resentment among the women (Pollert, 1981; Cavendish, 1982). Job segregation itself is even harder to reverse than grade distinctions or adjustments, since it may be reproduced by such acquiescence (Collinson and Knights, 1986), but this often results from the cooling-out and other strategies used by male managers and/or co-workers which – intentionally or unintentionally – have the effect of excluding women.

There is now widespread recognition that the division between men's and women's work often has very little indeed to do with

'objective' skills – in the sense of task difficulty, expertise or on-the-job experience (Craig *et al.*, 1984; Liff, 1986; Pearson, 1986). Studies of clothing have particularly questioned the skill basis of the distinction between male craftsmen (cutters and so on) and female seamstresses, overlockers, and so on (Coyle, 1982; Hoel, 1982; Cockburn, 1985). Peter Armstrong observed, in a study (1982) of a footwear and an electrical components factory, that whatever else may have distinguished the shop-floor work of semi-skilled men and unskilled women, objective skill levels did not. For example, in a purely technical sense the machines used by women machinists in footwear were a good deal more complicated than the hand presses operated by some of the men. I shall return to the nature of the differences, but for the moment it is worth adding that such observations do not apply only in manufacturing.

In white-collar work too, the division between women's and men's work, which is so often a distinction between clerical and administrative jobs, is far from adequately explained in terms of skill. A significant minority of women clerical employees in insurance and local government have been found performing work which is demanding, complex and highly diverse (Crompton and Jones, 1984: 146; Collinson and Knights, 1986: 149–50). This is not entirely a case of specifically women's skills being unrecognised, since many administrative jobs (typically male) appear to require similar skills and aptitudes, such as organisational abilities. Recent research in the National Health Service (NHS) comes to similar conclusions. Celia Davies and Jane Rosser (1986) found, for example, that the initially clear distinctions which management drew between administrative and clerical work broke down on reflection. Employees on both grades could be found doing the work of 'glorified secretary', 'senior clerk' or 'proper administrator'. The work of (mostly female) higher clerical officers covered a huge range – at one end very routine, standardised work; at the other little if anything to distinguish it from that of general administrative assistants (less than half of whom were women).

The problematic association between skills and grades does not, of course, escape management either. Both studies reported managers' comments that it suited their organisation very well to have highly skilled or experienced women in specifically clerical jobs, because they come cheaper than they would if their job were upgraded and because their immobility and competence in running the office directly benefits their superiors. From a structural point of view also,

women's career immobility – albeit caused by other factors too, such as a lack of the right credentials – has been crucial to the career mobility of men (Crompton and Jones, 1984).

There is little, it appears, in many studies of work to support what some call a technician conception of skill – of skill being determined by technical factors and equated with task difficulty. But this does not mean that skills are entirely socially constructed. They are not simply arbitrary. Phillips and Taylor were themselves very careful to argue against 'total subjectification', for 'in all cases [they considered] *some* basis was found in the content of work to justify the distinctions between men's and women's work' (1980: 85). However, having made this disclaimer, they went on directly to suggest that the historical equations between men and skill, women and unskill, are so powerful that once a job is identified with women, this ensures the downgrading of its skill content: 'it is the sex of those who do the work, rather than its content, which leads to its identification as skilled or unskilled'. It is easy to see how, following their work, skill has been seen as a mere label men cast on their otherwise virtually indistinguishable work, simply because they have superior bargaining strength.

Clearly, then, Phillips and Taylor regarded any material differences in men's and women's work as pretty inconsequential. This – and a weakness of their analysis – is evident from one of their examples. Drawing on other research, they suggest that work producing cartons is 'semi-skilled' because it is done by men or women in a situation where work is very similar, whereas work producing boxes is 'unskilled' because it is performed only by women, even though it requires more individual concentration (*ibid.*: 84). But the material difference in the labour process over which they slide is a difference between capital- and labour-intensive production. Carton production entails the former (it is more automated), box production the latter (hand-fed machines).

It is this distinction – that between capital- and labour-intensive processes – that Armstrong (1982) explored in his study. There was one crucial difference between the work of the supposedly unskilled women machinists and the semi-skilled men in footwear: the far greater cost of men's hand presses (even the individual moulds in them) compared with sewing machines. This led him to observe that:

Men tend to monopolise both craft work and capital-intensive processes, whatever the level of skill involved in the latter.

Correspondingly, women's work tends to be unrecognised as skilled (whatever the actual levels of skill) *and* of a labour-intensive kind (implying that complex equipment may be used providing only that it is cheap). (1982: 32)

Armstrong traced the recent development of gender segregation in the two factories to an increase in the level of capital investment per worker and associated the far greater insecurity of the women with their acute vulnerability to lay-off in comparatively labour-intensive processes (due to the unpredictable output from men's presses, declining orders, and so on). Their far lower earnings were also due to non-access to the shift and night work which management required on the capital-intensive processes, in part to justify their costly investment (ibid.: 34-9). What are the insights and limitations of such an approach?

A related, though different argument, has been made by Bennett (1984). She maintains that skill is an ideological construction in that there is no *a priori* reason for valuing certain characteristics (such as task width, mode of acquiring expertise) rather than others, and that socially recognised skill reflects the greater bargaining power of those who claim its title. But claimants exercise such power not for reasons extrinsic to the labour process but because they occupy a place in the labour process that does in fact give them more control. The features of work organisation which form the basis of that control are identified as the indices of skill. Now, capital-intensive work, or technological competence (to which I shall return), or even genuine craft capacities, might be seen as examples of such control – despite the fact that the kinds of control represented by craft skill and control of machines is quite different (Armstrong, 1982: 36).

There remains, however, a central question: why women are excluded; why women rather than men do not feature much or monopolise such key positions; why, in contrast, women are typically found in jobs which lack qualities conducive to craft organisation or a successful claim to skill status of some kind. Armstrong argued that women were not hired for semi-skilled capital-intensive operations because of the economic pressures favouring shift work, management's use of protective legislation to justify exclusion (to avoid equal-pay claims) and belief in the greater reliability of men who were also unwilling to work permanent nights. We seem to be back where we started, locating the causes of women's subordinate position in social production in terms of their actual or assumed role in the

family – in terms, that is, of the ‘fit’ between women’s real domestic situation, patriarchal ideology and the imperatives of capital: a combination that also explains women’s ‘suitability’ as cheap, flexible and often disposable labour for labour-intensive work.

These factors are, in my view, important and need further recognition. As Miriam Glucksmann (1986) emphasises, however, women are by no means confined to backward, labour-intensive industries, for they were central to the consumer-goods expansion of the interwar period and the development of assembly-line mass production. This situation is paralleled by the contemporary role of female labour in electronics, although even in industries like this, transformed by very considerable capital investment in information technology, it seems that women are concentrated in their comparatively labour-intensive sectors. In explaining the differential use of women’s and men’s labour in early American electrical and auto manufacture, Ruth Milkman emphasises the control regimes appropriate to relatively labour- and capital-intensive methods of mass production, and the way in which the former’s reliance on cheap labour and the latter’s on high-wage strategies combined with gender ideology and sex typing (Milkman, 1983: esp. 171–6). Capital’s imperatives, moreover, even economic ones, are not necessarily to be equated with the need for cheap and docile labour. The need for flexibility may entail dispensability or acceptance of unpredictable hours and earnings, or it may entail adaptability. Even within a single sector like electronics, different capitals will seek compliance, reliability, experience, dexterity or a combination of all these – a function of both their production needs and the wider sociopolitical contexts in which they operate (Pearson, 1986).

There is also a case for specifying more carefully the kinds of conditions under which patriarchal strategies might play as determining – if not more determining – a part than such ‘imperatives’ in structuring gender divisions in the labour process. This requires, as Sonia Liff (1986) stresses, a distinction between initial occupational segregation and its maintenance or resilience. Liff herself suggests that women are drawn more easily into *newly* mechanised areas, for this does not breach established sex typing or prevailing ideologies. We might then expect men to pursue exclusionary strategies, or at least a defensive attempt to preserve their differentials, when existing occupational boundaries are threatened – although this too would depend on the balance of forces as between labour and capital in the sector in question. It is true, as Liff also reminds us, that patriarchal

interests (or indeed any interests) are not to be identified only in situations of conflict. But whether such interests are manifested as effective power over women might also depend critically on the balance of class relations. Milkman's study shows that the threat of male unemployment in electrical manufacturing, given management's attempt to substitute women, led men to support women's struggle for equal pay, and although this strategy was prompted by men's interests in keeping their jobs, it also 'challenged the very basis of job segregation by sex' (Milkman, 1983, esp. 190-3).²

GENDERED WORK?

A number of recent feminist studies have, by contrast, attempted a more thorough integration of gender and class relations, maintaining that gender is integral to the labour process. Davies and Rosser (1986), for example, argue that gender is not merely functional to work organisation and that to see female labour as a lever of capital accumulation (and only a possible lever at that), as for instance a useful form of workplace division, is wrongly to allocate women to the case study rather than the theory chapter. Women's work is not incidental, not a mere matter of detail. But this, they claim, is not simply due to vested interests, as we have seen, in keeping women in subordinate grades, nor even to the need for caring qualities in some women's jobs. It is integral because women's work as work is an intrinsic part of the labour process. Inserting women's work into the labour process means recognising what they call 'gendered jobs'. In demonstrating that gender has been built into the labour process in this way, they argue two points. First, that 'women's *places* in this organisation have become forged in relation to their life cycle stage and home commitments in a way that men's have not' (1986: 105). It was older married women returners who were found as 'jills of all trades'; younger women who were found in the fragmented, standardised jobs at headquarters (see also Crompton and Jones, 1984). Second, they argue, the female 'office management' function does draw on women's skills as household managers and as family counsellors; and historically the NHS took over much clerical/administrative work that had been previously been done by women as part of their other responsibilities (as nurses, health visitors, or as volunteers). So when, then, it comes to the evidence for 'gendered jobs', it does seem as if they rely on familiar extrinsic forces to

explain the distribution of men and women in employment: women's distinctive life cycles and women's hidden invisible skills. But they also argue in a sense that these jobs are in practice unthinkable without such skills, for they are jobs which essentially 'capitalised on the qualities and capabilities a woman had gained by virtue of having lived her life as a woman' (Davies and Rosser, 1986: 103).

An even stronger version of the thesis on the integral connection of gender and the labour process is proposed by Ann Game and Rosemary Pringle (1984). They see the sexual division of labour as a defining feature of capitalism, as central as wage labour or surplus value, and refer to the inner logic of capital as patriarchal on the grounds that capitalist rationality is based on male dominance. But in support of this somewhat unorthodox case, they rely on some familiar themes such as the benefits of gender divisions in producing 'natural wastage', cheap labour, and so on, and in compensating men for their often low position in the hierarchy. They offer, though, very little direct evidence for their claim that 'men's jobs give them an illusion of control in relation to women's' (1984: 23) and more generally their propositions are asserted rather than substantiated, including claims about the relation of technology to masculinity.

That gender identities are constructed and reinforced through work is clearly important. It plays a key part in acceptance of and identification with work of different kinds (Willis, 1978; Pollert, 1981; Griffin, 1985; Sherratt, 1983) and in women's and men's differential experience of the costs of unemployment (Coyle, 1984). However, while work may be central to gender identity, the question remains: how, or in what ways, is gender central to the organisation of work, perhaps particularly to work which does not appear to be premised on women's skills? It is Cockburn who has explored these questions more fully and systematically than most.

Material matters

The importance of Cynthia Cockburn's work lies in her focus on what she calls 'the material of male power', but this involves both an elaboration of Hartmann's concept of patriarchy *and* a recognition of the reality of skill. This recognition coexists with a more familiar awareness of the ideological factor in skill definitions. She stresses, for example, that old skills have been overrated by craftsmen in their defence of labour and the wage, as in the clothing industry. Skilling and deskilling are also in part subjective, depending on past exper-

ience, so that computerised grading, with its specific competences, might well be experienced as skilled by women, hitherto excluded from clothing pattern rooms. But she emphasises that substantial deskilling has taken place. Women have increasingly substituted for men in clothing as technical developments and work reorganisation have fragmented tasks and eroded craft control over recruitment and the nature and pace of work, a process clearly underwritten by management intentions and the perceived benefits of introducing information technology (Cockburn, 1985: 44–68; see also Coyle, 1982).

The complexities of skill, once ‘unpacked’, formed a core aspect of Cockburn’s earlier study of printing. She notes that the ‘practical difference’ between keyboard typesetting (men’s work) and desk typing (women’s) is ‘slight’, but argues that such a formulation ‘leads to an underemphasis on the material realities (albeit socially acquired) of physical power and with them the tangible factors in skill which it is [her] purpose to reassert’ (1981: 49). Indeed, recognising ‘the measure of reality behind the male customary over-estimate of his skill’ is essential to understanding the impact of photocomposition. For example, although deskilling itself entails an erosion of trade-union control, it is the loss of the old tangible elements of compositors’ skills which has increased the significance of their sociopolitical organisation and power (ibid.: 50). At the same time, however, these tangible elements are – and here is the rub – precisely what gives work its ‘gendered’ character.

Cockburn is referring here to real competences acquired over time, for example, through apprenticeship, which entail particular kinds of expertise and also a grasp over the labour process as a whole. They are both intellectual and physical, but it is the latter which concerns her most. Physical power and initiative and technological competence are seen as materially distinguishing the work of men and women. The exploration of these tangible factors and the processes that produce them constitutes her project.

Bodily and technical effectivity are often related, for ‘among the physical are knack, strength and intimacy with a technology’ (1981: 50). It is these which go a long way to explain male printers’ identification with their craft. Cockburn’s study paints a very telling and sympathetic portrait of the struggle between print workers and management for control of the labour process, but it also reveals the extent to which the printers identified as working-class *men* with hot-metal technology in a way that, along with their diverse skills,

compensated for its disadvantages. So too, she identified, through observation and interview data, a distinct measure of emasculation experienced, often quite explicitly, by the printers in the move to 'cold' composition. For phototypesetting entails 'women's' typing skills, the manipulation of paper and symbols rather than the moving of heavy and mechanical parts, quietness rather than noise and dirt. Some skills like dexterity and speed were required of hot-metal composing, but not along with sedentary work (1983a: ch. 4).

Cockburn's starting point is the reality of most men's physical strength, refusing to see this as pure illusion, and the familiarity of men with tools and machinery, albeit socially acquired. In addition, however, women are typically not found in work using technological skills. These skills, she emphasises, are particularly significant (real). They involve 'essentially transferable knowledge', for the 'production or adaptation of other producers' instruments of labour'. So they can enhance, impede, direct or redirect the labour processes of others, and because they precisely permit the yoking of labour and machinery they are crucial to the production of wealth (1985: 24-7). The reasons, then, that technological skills command greater power than other, ordinary productive or domestic skills are not ideological.

None the less, Cockburn is not seeking a return to essentialist concepts. Clearly the rewards associated with such skills are also a function of organisation. Also the physical requirements of work are not pre-given, and men's possession of physical and technical capacities is the outcome of social processes (of which more in a moment). In particular, technological skills have been and continue to be appropriated by men.

The extent and nature of women's absence from jobs entailing physical and/or technical competence is specifically explored in Cockburn's study of information technologies (IT) in clothing pattern rooms, mail-order warehousing and radiography. Like many other researchers, she found women increasingly concentrated in operator jobs. By contrast, women were strikingly absent from the IT hierarchy itself within these sectors or the 'upstream' locations where IT is designed, developed and serviced – absent, that is, from jobs as systems technologists, maintenance or engineering technicians, technical managers, engineers and so forth. Women's operating jobs did vary considerably in terms of the skill required and control allowed, but she observed that they had one crucial thing in common: 'they did not afford the operators knowledge concerning the structure or internal processes of the equipment'. Indeed, she argues:

there appears to be a general 'law' that women are found in jobs where they may 'press the button' to achieve normal output, but not in jobs that 'meddle with the works', jobs where they could be called on to intervene in the mechanism itself. (1986a: 76).

What women's operating jobs lacked is what, in particular, higher-level skilled technological jobs had: an interactive relationship with the equipment. Moreover, men's jobs which lack such properties often entail other material capacities. Warehouse labouring involves physical strength and for those who operate forklift and picker trucks, 'the physicality is enhanced by control of the machine' (1985: 100).

Cockburn goes on to argue that women are excluded from technological jobs in particular not so much by discrimination as by the cultural relations at work: by male camaraderie, competitiveness and ever-present definitions of women as 'not technological'. Technological competence and physical power and initiative are appropriated by men materially and ideologically. They become established as men's work (on account of social associations with masculinity) and are actively reproduced as such in the workplace. Women are inhibited from acquiring technological skills, at home or at work, by the presence of men and, though they often resent this, women who want to be technologically competent are typically asked to pay too high a price – to deny or abdicate their femininity (1985: 203–7; 1986b: 42–5; see also Griffiths, 1985).

More generally, she argues for the interconnectedness of class and gender relations, the one entailing a struggle over control, the other a struggle over tenure:

men *as men* appropriate and sequester the technological sphere, extending their tenure (not *control* – that remains with capital) over each new phase, at the expense of women. (Cockburn, 1986a: 82)

For 'you do not need to own the means of production (capital does that) to deploy them to sexual advantage' (ibid.: 78). As she wryly observes, the sexual harassment experienced by women demonstrates that men are not just engaged in the public project of dominating nature but in the private one of controlling women (1985: 203). Indeed, it seems as if men may seek to retain or extend their

hold on technology in relation to encroachment of male power in other spheres.

Cynthia Cockburn's thesis, then, is a powerful one, but it does pose a number of problems. In the first place, she overdraws the similarities of men's work, playing down differences between men. This itself is important, but one effect is that she thus overemphasises the distinctions between the work of men and women. It is, of course, abundantly clear that women are negligibly represented in higher-level and/or technical jobs and over-represented elsewhere. For example, in the early 1980s women in engineering formed about 3 per cent of scientists and technologists, under 3 per cent of technicians, only 0.3 per cent of craft workers but around 30 per cent of operators (Cockburn, 1983b; Swords-Isherwood, 1985). So at least 70 per cent of operators were men, albeit some of them semi-skilled setter operators. Cockburn is well aware that some men labour at tiring, unskilled and even dangerous jobs, but she maintains of warehousing that 'however rude their labours may be, men's jobs are mobile and not repetitive' (1985: 100). She argues too that elsewhere more job satisfaction and self-supervision are often entailed, and that even for low-paid men a measure of this can be gained by virtue of the fraternity between technically minded men. Whether in fact such privileges are enjoyed by male operators in, for example, car assembly is, however, a moot point. Cockburn is undoubtedly right to note that physical and/or technical competences (even machine control) are real qualities that can often be used by men to lever for more pay or autonomy. But machine pacing is a feature of a great deal of men's semi-skilled work and in such cases the higher pay that men command over women can stem less from such abilities than from access to overtime and shift premiums. Armstrong (1982) shows graphically how men's basic rates in two sectors of light manufacturing were close to those of women, that men could earn a 'family wage' only from long hours of overtime and that such overtime was in effect made compulsory by management, illustrating that the kinds of control represented by craft skill and machine control are quite distinct. Women's position, however, was still more vulnerable because of their location in labour-intensive processes which were acutely subject to lay-off and dependent on the unpredictable output from the men's presses.

More specifically, Cockburn's attempt to interrelate class and gender allows gender identity to obliterate class position. It is true that most engineers are men, while most shop-floor and office

employees are women, but the comparison she draws between the pay and conditions of routine factory and clerical workers on the one hand and those of 'top-flight' or software engineers, working directors or consultants on the other (1985: 158–61) is above all a comparison between those who labour and those who control. The exception might be the case of technicians, but as she herself notes of clothing, it is male craftsmen who have precisely lost their skills to a new breed of technicians and systems managers who exercise technological authority and control over both women operators *and* themselves (ibid.: 74–7). It is only men who have real access to these new high-paid technical posts, but some men, including displaced craftsmen, are also excluded from the career hierarchy. Indeed, there has been a substantial increase in formalised barriers between manual and technical workers in engineering, recently heightened by information technology (Smith, 1986). There is perhaps a glimpse of this when Cockburn notes (1985: 179) that men's defence against women derives in part from the struggle for status as between craft, technical and professional engineers, and that the manual craftsman defends his self-respect in terms which are a product of both class and patriarchal ranking and symbolism. What counts as masculine surely varies for men, in determinate ways, and no doubt gender 'discourses' vary for women too. But in particular she gives inadequate attention to the ways in which gender identity is itself class structured, and it is perhaps too easily assumed that masculinity welds together those whose class position is in fact quite distinct.

Cockburn is also well aware that not all men are technologically skilled or knowledgeable, and maintains that 'it is not men but masculinity that has this bond with machinery' (1985: 179). Technology has been appropriated by men as a sex. Now it is also, as I have stressed, a component of class relations and the bond to which she refers may be less resilient than class domination because it is not the mechanism through which economic production is socially organised.³ If, though, we leave the issue of class and technology on one side, the point she is making is that while some men may be left out in the cold, virtually all women have been excluded from technological expertise (see also 1985: ch. 1). Here she does seem on firmer ground, for she argues in a sense that the exceptions prove the rule. For example, the one exception to women's absence from the IT hierarchy is the case of trainers, but this appears to be due to their perceived feminine attributes and skills for public-relations work in handling clients. Some women have managed to break into other

areas of the technical domain, but at the price of denying their sexuality and femininity (ibid.: 203–7). Cockburn says of radiographers that the use of CT scanning has not in fact reduced them to mere operators, for it has been added to a range of other skills, thanks to the profession's control over work organisation. Compared, however, to the work of, say, medical physicists, theirs is still basically an operating job – or at least it is seen as one by male doctors and kept that way by the demarcation practices of engineers and technicians (ibid.: 135–41).

Cockburn is trying, then, to steer a course between recognising the reality or materiality of skill and avoiding the reification of technological competence. As noted earlier, she argues against returning us to an essentialist concept of skill. For example, men's physical strength is real but is not necessarily important – it is made to matter, as in printing where equipment could have been designed with different specifications (1981: 51; 1983: 100). Men frequently maintained in interviews that women are neither mechanically minded nor strong, but they also significantly revealed the sham of this when observing that work could and/or would be reorganised to allow for injury and that physical criteria like height or weight were not used in selecting men – it was enough to be a man (1985: 192). Women themselves often accept the 'logic' of men's claims and do not feel capable or deserving of men's work or pay, even while questioning or resenting this (ibid.: 105; see also Porter, 1983; Pollert, 1981). Of course these are not the only grounds for job segregation by sex, but this brings us to the wider question of exclusion.

The ideological processes which help to sustain gender divisions and inequalities are graphically exposed in Cockburn's work, perhaps because it draws so extensively on the accounts given by men themselves, but her work is also distinctive in arguing that the mechanism of exclusion includes practices *in* work which solidify men and exclude women. It is not enough to look outside the workplace – at, say, socialisation or schools. There is 'something in the relations of employment, in work culture, that conspires to keep women from even aspiring to technical work' (1985: 165; also 1986b: 28–45). She charts the all-male culture, with its obscenity and sexual stories, its emphasis on aggression and drive and the way jobs are defined as masculine and as entailing total commitment and long hours of overtime. She argues that patriarchal exclusion, though informed by and reproducing ideology, is itself an active ongoing practice.

None the less, this focus on practices in work – which helps to demonstrate the way gender is built into the material fabric of work – co-exists with a more familiar formulation. Cockburn maintains, for example, that in one mail-order warehouse she studied sex differentiation is ‘intrinsic to methods of control’ (1985: 98). But it is so precisely on account of what women bring with them to the job: attributes determined outside the labour process itself. They are seen by management to make ideal pickers and packers because of their ‘diligent and serious’ approach and their identification as women with the needs and preferences of customers. Cockburn herself notes that ‘the interests and qualities of married women part-timers’ make them an ideal labour force for this low-paid but arduous work, and that their displacement as local textile workers undoubtedly also contributes to their diligence.

WOMEN’S WORK AND RESTRUCTURING

This classic use of female labour returns us to more conventional aspects of the relation of gender to the labour process, in particular the connection between production and reproduction and the benefits of the sexual division of labour to capital. Part-time work has always been important for women (and it currently absorbs 45 per cent of all women in the employed labour force: IDS, 1986), but it has become of crucial significance to the character of many capitalist economies. This is particularly evident in Britain where it forms an integral part of the current phase of restructuring.

Such employment growth as has occurred has been overwhelmingly part-time. Between 1971 and 1981 76 per cent of employment gains in manufacturing, 74 per cent of those in distribution and 56 per cent of those in professional and scientific, 71 per cent of those in miscellaneous services were part-time jobs, and women’s part-time work accounted for 65 per cent, 60 per cent, 52 per cent and 61 per cent respectively of the total expansion in each sector (Dex and Perry, 1984). Between 1982 and 1986 the proportion of women part-timers among employees rose from 18.3 to over 21 per cent, and in services it rose to 29 per cent (IDS, 1986).

These trends have continued in the 1980s despite recent revisions of the aggregate figures. The 1984 Census of Employment reveals – in the context of substantial overall decline – a lower growth in part-time female employment and a lower decline in full-time female

employment than had previously been estimated (*Employment Gazette*, January 1987). Nevertheless, between 1981 and 1984 in service industries – the only sector where employment growth took place – women's jobs accounted for 58 per cent of the total measured increase (and women part-timers alone for over a third) and between 1983 and 1986 part-time women accounted for 29 per cent, full-time women for 31 per cent of the estimated extra one million or so in the employed labour force.

Other patterns established in the late 1970s, or earlier, have become even more marked. On the one hand employment growth has been especially dramatic in those parts of the service sector dominated by financial capital – in banking and financial services of various kinds, in business services, real estate and so on. On the other, it has grown in the more traditional realms of service work: in the hotel trade, in sport, recreational and cultural services and in those referred to as 'other', such as welfare, tourist and community services. Not only has the service sector grown more than anticipated (*Employment Gazette*, January 1987) but it is in the above areas that the growth of part-time work has been most striking. In the four years to March 1986, the numbers of part-timers in banking and finance rose by almost half, partly associated with the building society boom. In retail distribution it grew by more than a fifth (IDS, 1986).

Part-time employment has grown for men too, but by nothing like the same amount, and it still constitutes a minute proportion (3 per cent) of all men's employment in Britain (*ibid.*). Elsewhere, as in The Netherlands, Japan and North America, part-time work is becoming increasingly important for men (absorbing around 7 per cent of male workers) but women still provide the vast majority of part-time labour (Neubourg, 1985). At the same time, the growth of part-time work is, of course, only one of several current trends. Women's supposedly semi- and unskilled labour has in general become of vital importance to the development of manufacturing sectors like electronics, albeit to a lesser extent than in Third World locations (Pearson, 1986). Apart from homeworking (Allen and Wolkowitz, 1987), other significant developments in Britain include the substantial increase in self-employment and temporary work, but these too have a gender dimension. Self-employment has grown more rapidly among women, although this is partly because the base starting point is so low and men remain the great majority of the self-employed, with large numbers in construction. But it is distribution, hotels, catering, repairs and other services which absorb the largest propor-

tions of the self-employed, particularly among women (Creigh *et al.*, 1986; *Employment Gazette*, April 1987), and official data undoubtedly exclude much undeclared female self-employment especially in personal services. Meager (1986) found that temporary work had expanded, particularly among larger and faster-growing employers and in higher-grade non-manual occupations, but that almost two-thirds of all temporary workers were women, and two-thirds of them were in personal service work: catering, cleaning and the like.

These developments are often components of employer strategies to increase labour-force flexibility. The use of part-time workers has always been associated with this (whatever other factors may operate); hence the volatility of part-time employment which – in the 1970s, for example – rose faster than full-time in upturns but also fell more rapidly than full-time in downturns (Bruegel, 1979; Dex and Perry, 1984). As for temporary work and self-employment, these may rarely be, at the aggregate level, a specific substitute for permanent or direct employment, but their association with flexibility, as well as cost reductions, is often clear in particular instances (Fevre, 1986; Huws, 1984; Meager, 1986).

All these kinds of employment relation are far from new. Indeed, it is now recognised that subcontract, for example, was far more important for the historical development of the capitalist labour process than was once supposed (Littler, 1982) and it has been sharply observed that outwork was just as defining, if not as predominant a feature of the nineteenth-century capitalist economy as ‘modern industry’ (Alexander, 1976). But whatever may have been the marginality or otherwise of forms like outwork to trends in nineteenth-century capital accumulation, the developments outlined above are central to the emerging character of the current British economy, given both the changing nature of manufacturing itself (Murray, 1983) and the shift to services. They must also be understood in the wider political context of government economic and social policy.

What is striking in the present period is the extent to which women are at the forefront of key developments. This too is not in itself new. Women’s vital contribution to the very development of mass-production industries in the interwar period is rarely acknowledged, but Glucksmann (1986) has demonstrated the way in which Fordism in Britain was initially and extensively developed precisely on the basis of female labour in the new consumer-goods sectors. As in the 1930s – though in very different ways – women’s labour is playing a

crucial part in the restructuring of capital. Apart from electronics, there is a sense, as Veronica Beechey (1985) suggests, in which 'The desire for flexibility takes a gendered form, and in Britain today it is almost exclusively women's jobs that have been constructed on a part-time basis.' On a more specific level, the exploitation of women's labour is at the heart, for example, of the increasingly profitable and fast-growing contract cleaning industry in Britain. As Angela Coyle puts it:

as the work of cleaning is being reorganised and restructured as subcontracted work, women cleaners are at the forefront of a generalised attack, not just on pay and conditions, but fundamental rights at work. (1986: 5)

As women's work in a classic sense these developments could be typically marginalised, but Coyle maintains (1985; 1986) that this subcontracting of services is of much wider significance, for it promises in general to be one of the major shifts in work organisation in the next decade. If so, the basis on which it is secured is crucially important. Coyle shows that the downward pressure on costs and the deterioration of working conditions (even in regularised employment) is in part a product of the competitive nature of tendering and the impetus given to this by the privatisation of public-sector services, particularly in the 1980s. There is, in addition, the political impetus given by the erosion of trade-union, wage-council and other employment protection. But there is also an interdependence between the very organisation of the cleaning business and women's position in the labour market. As Coyle emphasises, this industry has capitalised, in a very real sense, on women's cheap and unskilled labour-power and their inability to avoid casual work. This stems principally from their family responsibilities but is often compounded by racial discrimination (see also Bernstein, 1986).

Employment relations are an important condition, if not themselves an intrinsic feature, of labour-process organisation and reorganisation. Their successful establishment depends to some degree on the specific features of labour markets. For example, in the steel industry redundancies and lack of alternative employment have combined on the one hand with management need for flexibility and, on the other, with informal recruitment through social networks among displaced steel workers to increase temporary contract work and casualisation (Morris, 1984; Fevre, 1986). This would seem to be but one instance

of a correspondence between degraded, insecure work and informal recruitment where the workforce is in an especially weak bargaining position. An example is the clothing industry's use of Asian, Cypriot or other ethnic-minority women (Hoel, 1982; Anthias, 1983). Employers can save costs and further increase their control by using contacts to find 'reliable' workers and using these and kin obligations as a sanction against protest.⁴ 'Contacts' may be especially useful in finding work for women who are both unqualified and need flexible work near home, but their circumstances and very dependence on informal recruitment restrict their options to very low-paid domestic and catering work (Chaney, 1981).

Even more generally, part-time work as a whole depends on the vulnerability of women in the labour market. There is now extensive evidence of the downward occupational mobility experienced by women, even qualified women, on their return to employment and its association with marriage and especially motherhood (Dex, 1984; Joshi, 1984; Joshi and Newell, 1986; Yeandle, 1984; Bird and West, 1987). What is clear is the huge scale on which women returners shift into semi- and unskilled work, especially in services and distribution as domestics and shop assistants.⁵ The nature and size of this occupational shift (compared, that is, with the kinds of work women were doing before they had to leave the labour force) is so substantial that it can only reflect the changing economic structure, particularly the decline in manufacturing. But as Dex puts it (1984: 48).

a natural break in women's working activity over childbirth is coinciding with or being used to shift the women's workforce out of non-manual and skilled work into part time semi-skilled work.

Undoubtedly women's domestic responsibilities, especially for young children, typically compel them to accept low pay and unsocial hours, lack of fringe benefits and job protection. Mothers are also driven to make individual bargains with employers who grant concessions, like unpaid time off. The costs to women of such concessions – dependence on a particular employer, fear of unionisation, etc. – all these are benefits to employers (Freeman, 1982).

However, these benefits to employers are not just determined by women's position in the family. They depend also on political factors such as inadequate childcare provision (hence reliance on unpredictable private arrangements). They depend, too, on state policy encouraging or enabling employers to keep hours and pay below the

thresholds for tax and employment protection, and discouraging increasing numbers of the poor from declaring their earnings. Even in the 1970s, women's part-time work in many European states was a good deal less significant than in the UK partly because of the economic disincentives of social security contributions to employers (Manley and Sawbridge, 1980) but more recently government action in many European economies has contributed to the growth in part-time work (Neubourg, 1985). Firms also directly reproduce or call into being the kinds of female labour force they desire through specific recruitment policies, work practices and other strategies (Pearson, 1986), and more generally, the economic and other benefits of women's labour power to employers depend on lack of organisation. This works at two levels. The benefits of women's low-paid but, in reality, often skilled and experienced labour power is secured for many firms through the combined effect of labour-market conditions and the absence of collective bargaining (Craig *et al.*, 1984). Moreover, as Coyle's study of contract cleaning makes plain, women have met the need for low-paid, unskilled, casual labour above all because of 'a complete lack of organised strength in the job market' (1986: 5). This in itself, of course, is partly due to trade unions' historical lack of commitment to the needs and conditions of women workers, and their particular neglect of part-timers, until very recently.

CONCLUSION

Women's work has acquired, then, a particular importance in the current restructuring of the labour process. Part-time work is a vital component of strategies to increase flexibility. In services it is especially important as one of the few means of intensifying labour and increasing productivity in relation to peaks in demand; in this sense it is the equivalent of the real subordination of labour in manufacturing.⁶ But its importance also refocuses attention on two issues: one is the more traditional feminist concern with the labour market and reproduction: the other is the importance of sexual divisions for capital.

Concern with the role of gender at the point of production has led to a neglect of labour-market issues, but there is an argument for readdressing them given the renewed significance of employment relations in the current period. Women are, as they have often been

in the past, in the front line of fundamental changes in the organisation of the labour process (Glucksmann, 1986; Coyle, 1986). These entail the establishment or reinforcement of specific work relations and, as such, are often contingent on labour-market vulnerability. Although the causes of labour-market position and of changes in production methods are quite separate, there is an interdependence between the use made of labour power within the production process and the conditions under which that labour power is sold. (Women's responsibilities for men and children and the circumstances of returners are undoubtedly crucial to the sale and use of their labour power, especially on a part-time basis.) But clearly those conditions are not determined only by women's distinctive position in the sphere of reproduction. They are determined as well by employer strategies (of recruitment, location, etc.) and by facilitating political relations.

Nevertheless, the theoretical shift that has occurred in the last decade has been to argue not just that women matter to social production but that gender itself is integral, and that this is located over and above the connections between production and reproduction. There is something else implicit in the concept of gender relations – and explicit in the concept of patriarchy: the view that men's interests as men (if not conflict between men and women) are often decisive. It is this that underpins the related argument that patriarchal relations are therefore as crucial as class relations for the labour process itself. I have suggested that support for this in terms, for example, of gendered jobs is in practice often based on the use made by employers of women's role in reproduction rather than on the ways in which gender relations *per se*, or gender relations *in work*, are determinant of women's place in production. I have suggested too that arguments for the incorporation of gender into the very heart of the labour process are problematic in so far as they tend to treat men's skills as pure illusion or myth. Women's skills and abilities are, of course, systematically and typically undervalued, but it is precisely this and a wider patriarchal ideology and practice which enables *women's* labour power to be deployed in truly deskilled work, and in semi- and unskilled work on such an extensive scale. The focus on gender and skill has tended to obscure material differences in men's and women's work. There is a real difference between technical or craft work on the one hand and operating jobs on the other; these and jobs which for other reasons are particularly low on control of the work process are so often sex-typed as women's work because women are denied the social power to resist their concentration there.

There has, though, been resistance to the idea that patriarchy merely allocates men and women to different places in the division of labour. This resistance has been most clearly articulated by Cockburn and she has, as I have attempted to show, enormously advanced our understanding of the ways in which gender is materially embodied in the texture of work itself, in work relations and in the ongoing practices of exclusion within the workplace. I have, however, argued that her analysis attributes too much homogeneity to men (and perhaps to women also) and in particular underplays class differences between men.

More generally, the debate on class and gender has often been conducted as if capital and men were of equal weight in the disadvantaging of women. While experientially this is undoubtedly true, it underplays the nature of capital's economic and political power. Also from the viewpoint of capital, at any rate, the use of gender relations may well be less appropriate than the use of other forms of subordination. The availability of migrant labour is a classic case in point. This 'alternative' labour source is succinctly if inadvertently recognised in an article in *The Economist* (17 January 1987), which maintains that married women part-timers:

have many of the advantages of youngsters – and few of the drawbacks. They are flexible, they seem to enjoy work more than their husbands, and they cost less in tax and social security contributions. *The same is true of immigrants* (emphasis added).

It might be true that in principle capitalist production is thinkable without a dependence on gender divisions as such,⁷ or that capitalism could, under certain conditions, provide for the reproduction of the labour force without the nuclear family. But in practice, the sexual division of labour does provide economic and political benefits to capital and is in any case reproduced as a normal part of capitalist development.

More important, however, as Phillips and Taylor (1980) argued, capitalist development is in fact premised on a whole variety of strictly non-class forms of subordination and the real context in which the struggle of labour and capital is played out is a terrain marked by the concrete attributes of gender – or, indeed, race and ethnicity. Ethnic-minority labour might well be a preferred source for capital, but ethnic-minority labour is gendered too. It is no accident that

ethnic-minority women are typically among the most exploited workers (Phizacklea, 1983).

The point is also that these concrete relations have a real effectivity of their own. As Ruth Pearson (1986) puts it, capital has to negotiate, in its search for an available labour force, with both women's role in reproduction and with patriarchy. The contradictory consequences of this are perhaps well illustrated by the extent to which multinational capital in the depressed north-east had to bend to accommodate the 'need' for male employment in the region, Courtaulds having employed ex-miners in light and repetitive work (Austrin and Beynon, 1979). But just as the significance of patriarchy is a clearly contingent matter, so too the very importance of the sexual division of labour for capital is not inevitable but depends on determinate political and economic conditions. Part-time work, for example, however important, is one of several current features of capitalist economies some of which, like subcontract or flexible specialisation, do not necessarily have a gender dimension or at least whose development is not necessarily explained by that. While gender, and race, may be crucial to the analysis of subcontract in the clothing or cleaning industries (Phizacklea, 1987; Coyle, 1986), it is arguably not so in the case of engineering. The current importance of women's work arises from the strategies pursued by capital, especially commercial and financial capital, in the context of local labour markets, family relations and government policies which, of course, have impacted on all these in quite specific ways.

Notes

1. For example, patriarchal relations played a central part in the development of textile industries (Lazonick, 1978; Bradley, 1986; Littler, 1982), even if the forms of subcontract with which they were so often associated were less widely deployed than is sometimes supposed (Anderson, 1976). But it is rather less plausible to maintain that patriarchy was crucial to other key industries on which nineteenth-century capitalist development depended. Exclusion of women from skilled work and unions was widespread, but the extent to which specifically patriarchal forces contributed to labour process organisation is an empirical and variable matter (Lewis, 1985; Littler, 1982).
2. Milkman points as well to the complexity of 'men's interests' – which are often treated far too unproblematically. Women can also be the unintended victims of men's 'gender-blind' strategies in defending themselves against exploitation by capital, as Armstrong's study suggests.

3. To some extent Cockburn herself recognises this in distinguishing, as I noted earlier (p. 257), control and tenure over the means of production. But in so doing she seems to equate only the former with class, the latter only with gender. Among those without control (labour) there are those with tenure (men) and those without (women). This basically polarised conception of class relations seems to underlie her neglect of divisions among men or the assumption that masculinity obscures them.
4. Informal recruitment can increase management control in other sectors too: for example over male employees in life-insurance sales, where it also effectively excludes women from promotion (Collinson and Knights, 1985). Elsewhere, as in the City, it even more clearly helps to preserve privilege.
5. See, for example, Dex (1984), pp. 46–8, 66–7. The data from the Women and Employment Survey show that downward mobility is greatest among those who return only after completing their families, it being experienced by 62 per cent of those who had been skilled workers, 50 per cent of ex-clerical workers, 39 per cent of nurses and 33 per cent of those in professional or intermediate non-manual occupations. While all the downwardly mobile skilled workers moved into shop, semi-skilled, domestic or unskilled work, this move was also true for 47 per cent of all clerks, 26 per cent of nurses and 24 per cent of professional and other non-manual workers. A large proportion of the downwardly mobile remained so through their final work phase.
6. My thanks to David Knights for this observation and for his helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. Many thanks also to Alison Lever for suggestions and support.
7. The existence, until the mid-1970s, of a truly migrant labour reserve in Western Europe, as compared to a settled immigrant minority in Britain, may have contributed to a lesser reliance on part-time female labour, in France and Germany for example.

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9 Fragmented Labours*

Gibson Burrell

INTRODUCTION

This is an exploratory contribution which has to be seen as one fragment of a wider project. In it I shall raise issues not yet discussed widely in the labour process debate. My concern is to seek to understand the British context in which *Labor and Monopoly Capital* was received in the mid-1970s and to suggest that it is a text in the 'Modernist' tradition. What I shall try to explain is why Braverman's theoretical structure came to the attention of so many British writers concerned with the analysis of industry and why they then set to with a will and energy to dismantle it (Storey, 1985; Thompson, in this volume). In other words, whilst some attention has to be paid to the content of Braverman's approach, the emphasis here is not upon providing an internalist account of the book's strengths and weaknesses but upon providing one type of externalist account of the debate it engendered. No serious attempt will be made to explain the progress of the debate by linking it to changes in the material base of the social sciences although, of course, this is a necessary dimension in any full appraisal of Braverman's impact.

Rather, it will be argued that the major currents of anti-Modernism now visible in social theory (in either pre-Modernist or post-Modernist variants) indicate why the wrecking of Braverman's work was carried out with such speed and precision. Thompson has warned us of 'the fruitless search for the all-embracing descriptive and analytical category' (Thompson, this volume) but this is precisely what the Modernist project entails in the search for totalising frameworks, a unity of subject and object, a unity in history and for a narrative which explains the fundamental nature of the world and our place within it (Wellmer, 1985). Braverman's work in this sense is an attempt to articulate a Modernist project and suffers from all the

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problems that this entails (Lyotard, 1984). Nevertheless, it is argued here that the Modernist goal is still worth pursuing and the final part of this chapter attempts to outline the preliminaries necessary to rebuild upon Braverman's approach. The focus of attention, however, is 'labour' as an analytical category and not upon the more narrowly focused 'labour process'. Indeed, the fact that labour process theory 'is holed and patched beyond repair' (Storey, 1985: 194) is due, in some measure, to this narrowness of vision. As Thompson has remarked (in this volume) there is a need to recognise and set out the limits and boundaries of the theory – but only as a precursor for a new starting point of debate.

THE RISE OF BRAVERMANIA

Harry Braverman's book *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, published in 1974, achieved the status of a classic in a relatively short period of time and initiated widespread debate, empirical field research, and historical analysis in a wide variety of hitherto disconnected fields. The description of this flurry of activity as 'Bravermania' (Littler and Salaman, 1982) indicates the frenzied growth in interest in the 'labour process', but – and it is a large 'but' – we must not forget the even more pronounced development of the anti-Braverman position which flourished almost as soon as his book appeared.

By the mid-1970s, British industrial sociology was in danger of losing its distinctive competence. The Affluent Worker studies (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1966, 1968, 1969), whose impact upon a younger generation of researchers was also profound, generated a view of the industrial sociologist as someone equally at home in the factory, the social club, the family living-room or the trade-union branch office. Thus the researcher could no longer focus upon the point of production, its technology and its workflow for we were told that 'orientations to work' had their origin outside the factory gates. Industrial sociologists trained in the post-Luton years had to be aware of – and interested in – the worker's family life, socialising habits, religious affiliations, and voting patterns and hold back any preoccupation with the detailed workings of the production process which, for so long, provided a legitimate focus for the sub-discipline. We were now to interview members of the (male, manual, manufacturing) workforce in their factory and in the home, so that research became a matter of tramping the early-evening streets of the indus-

trial cities and towns, knocking on front doors in search of the few off-duty wage-labourers who did not mind being interviewed for a second time. The sociology of industry thus began to merge and coalesce with the sociology of the family, of the community, and of leisure. Its days of independence appeared to be numbered.

Braverman changed all that. Despite what Littler and Salaman (1982: 260) say, he regained for industrial sociology, in Britain at least, a distinctive competence by marking out an intellectual field of inquiry and suggesting that the action, after all, lay at the point of production. This meant we could return with a new theoretical justification (but not necessarily with new problems) to the factories and coal-mines and forsake the branches of social theory of which, in truth, we had scant knowledge and for which we had even scant regard.

Meanwhile, in industrial relations also, Bravermania developed in a limited form. Braverman hit home here because of his refusal to consider trade unions and organised collectivities of labour as contributing any meaningful resistance to the deskilling process within the workplace. This had the effect of stimulating historically based research within British industrial relations which accorded management (and hence capital) more of a central role in the analysis. In a period marked by the Rothschild report, Braverman provided a plane along which the managerialising reorientation of industrial relations might take place (Armstrong, 1985) and through which industrial sociology and industrial relations might grow closer together (Storey, 1985).

In organisation theory too, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* found fertile ground in certain areas. Braverman suggested that Taylorism should be understood not as a defunct ideological construct (Rose, 1975) but as a central feature of the capitalist labour process, being alive and well in the modern corporations of the contemporary Western economy. Likewise, human relations comprised guidelines by which the worker might become habituated to deskilled employment, and these could be found today within the personnel offices of most industrial firms. From reading Braverman, then, it becomes possible to say that organisation theory's chronology was all wrong. Taylorism and human relations were not dead and buried by the beginning of the Cold War but were enshrined and actively utilised in managerial practice. For some writers this meant that we had to see the development of the theory of organisation in a new, uncomfortable light.

On the three fields of industrial sociology, industrial relations and organisation theory, therefore, Braverman's book had an impact in Britain. The degree of change and redirection differed, and its full consequences may not be visible for many years yet, but few would deny that *Labor and Monopoly Capital* influenced many students' views of the world of work. Of particular importance, the notion of the 'labour process' provided a theoretical basis upon which analysts from differing disciplinary backgrounds could ponder. Thus, as the 1970s came to a close, the theory of the labour process held up the possibility of a conceptual uniformity around which new clusterings of individual researchers and research teams might coalesce (Brown, 1984). This is where some issues in the post-Modernism-Modernism debate begin to appear relevant.

The French writer Jean-François Lyotard, who has written suggestively on post-Modernism and its logically necessary cultural predecessor, suggests (Lyotard, 1984) that Modernism seeks the construction and articulation of *meta-narratives* – stories – which serve to unify, explain and unite a whole series of disparate phenomena within a total framework. Braverman, it could be argued, produced such a meta-narrative in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. It is a textual example, we might say, of the Modernist project in which a unifying narrative is closely woven, using only selected pieces of evidence and discarding all detail which is deemed to be superfluous to the telling of the tale. As such a meta-narrative of the development of industrial organisation, Braverman's work was brilliant.

THE FALL OF BRAVERMAN AND RE-FRAGMENTATION

Even before he died Braverman had been exposed to criticism, but the torrent of critical evaluation which followed his death signifies the importance of his work for our disciplinary areas. The major points of the critique revolve upon Braverman's romantic view of labour, his neglect of class-consciousness, his neglect of valorisation, his neglect of gender issues, his neglect of trade-union resistance, his failure to see the possibility of reskilling and of hyperskilling – indeed, his poor conception of skill itself – his overemphasis on Taylorism and de-emphasis on other forms of job design and his universalistic view of the deskilling process (Littler, 1982; Wood, 1982; Thompson, 1983).

This is the substance of an internalist critique of Braverman's work. The question I wish to address is: What is the *context* in which

the British critique developed? How would an externalist account of the anti-Braverman research begin? A full exploration of the material and meta-theoretical background to the critique is beyond the scope of this chapter, but the following features may be identified. First, the critique reflects, by and large, a dependence upon 'empiricism' as a relatively coherent set of philosophical assumptions. Reality in its concrete, detailed, day-to-day form is seen as rendering itself up in a non-problematic way to the close observer, for whom the 'facts' will be readily apparent. Second, there is a dependency on rather crude notions of *falsification*. There is an apparent willingness to accept that social science should progress – and, indeed, does progress – through the falsification of hypotheses and that if counterfactuals can be produced to a generalisable statement, then science is the better off for it. Third, the British strength in historiography provides a major resource upon which the Braverman critics have drawn. But *historiography* often eschews 'grand theory' (Thompson, 1981) and in place of wide universalities it puts its faith in the subtleties of close-grained description.

All three of these philosophical starting points end up in the weapon which has been used to crack Braverman's work wide open – the detailed *case study* of British firms, often from a *historical* perspective from which *counterfactuals* to, amongst other things, the thesis of deskilling have been adduced which are then seen as representing a *falsification* of Braverman's position (Lazonick, 1979; Littler, 1982; Wood, 1982). It should be noted that this approach allows many a British academic to claim that social science is progressing every time a case study or doctoral research finds that the thesis of deskilling is an overgeneralisation. *Labor and Monopoly Capital* is marvellous as a launching pad for any piece of unimaginative research, old or new, to gain a currency and a place in contemporary debate. Here I would part company with Thompson, who argues: 'one of the few things that distinguishes the new empiricist sociology and industrial relations from the old is the retention and veneer of labour process concepts and terminology' (Thompson, in this volume). In fact, there is virtually no difference between the pre-Luton and post-Luton eras since these concepts and terminology are subjected to critique and dismemberment (Penn, 1985) rather than serving some constructive purpose. Furthermore, the same issues of technology's role, the strategic nature of work groups, the solidaristic nature of trade-union consciousness, and so on, continue to be researched, only now it is not the Affluent Worker studies which bear

the brunt of the attacks – it is labour process theory (Wood, 1982; Littler and Salaman, 1984; Salaman, 1986). Thus the labour process approach is merely the latest integral target for the empiricist attack, which in opposition draws strength and gains greater credence and legitimacy for its own tired, contingent produce.

From what I have briefly outlined above, one has to conclude that the British orientation to the study of industrial life is essentially pre-Modernist. It places the contingent before the universal, the minute detail before the total gestalt, the footnote at the front of the story. It has yet to embrace Modernism in many senses of that term. However, it is no use expecting that the reassessment of Braverman which this juxtaposition would entail will be welcomed, for Modernism and what it stands for has come under increasing attack from another direction. The Modernist project undertaken by Braverman now suffers from epistemological fragmentation as, more and more, certain academics fall into sympathy with the *post-Modernist* world-view that reality suffers from ontological fragmentation of a kind and to a degree which cannot be handled by any meta-narrative.

MODERNISM AND POST-MODERNISM

The debate between the advocates of post-Modernism on the one hand and defenders of Modernism on the other currently enjoys a high profile in the social sciences. It is an exceptionally complicated terrain and it may be approached in a variety of ways (Institute for Contemporary Arts, 1986) but of some utility here is entry through the Lyotard–Habermas dialogue (Bernstein, 1985; Wellmer, 1985). Habermas's defence of Modernity (Habermas, 1984) is based on the belief that it is essentially a liberating force, representing in the period after the Enlightenment an escape from a prior world of irrationality, fragmentation and ignorance. What is fully embraced in this new epoch is the goal of a total view of society, a total view of meaning, a total view of the subject's place in the life-world. What Modernism means, in this Habermasian sense, is a 'grand meta-narrative of post-war freedom'. On the other hand, for Lyotard (1984), 'Modernism' stands as a flawed system of knowledge in which meta-narratives such as that of Hegel have reached a high point of development. But there is now a lack of intellectual confidence in such unifying systems which locate the subject and history within some unfolding global process of social development. Today,

knowledge is fragmented into a plurality of 'language games' which are local rather than general in scope – but this is a state of affairs to be welcomed. The need for unity, for totalising attempts, no longer exists and with the abandonment of this search comes greater human freedom. Emancipation comes from the ability in a post-modern world to experiment, to question, to unshackle the imagination from the constraining bonds of rationality.

Both Lyotard and Habermas claim that human emancipation is their aim, but each sees this as best served by his own particular image of the prevailing social condition. Furthermore, the period each describes as 'Modernism' varies tremendously, and in several other ways the Lyotard–Habermas debate contains complexities of which we should at some point be aware. The issues are even more complicated within social theory as a whole, but if we were to look outside this narrow domain to, say, architecture, the terms Modernism and post-Modernism take on significantly different (though not unrelated) connotations. Nevertheless the central point here is that the rise and fall of Bravermania is locked inextricably into this debate. Whether writers are aware of this or not, the so-called 'crisis of contemporary culture' and the decline of Modernism have provided a part of the context in which the post-Braverman explosion of interest in the labour process has taken place.

THE DECLINE OF MODERNISM AND THE CRISIS IN LABOUR PROCESS THEORY

In the West, the theme of ontological fragmentation has risen to the surface of academic debate once more in recent years. Through the centuries, various generations have recognised tendencies in the 'real' material world which lead towards disintegration and fragmentation. For example, the philosophy of decline and fissure is quite clear in the writings of the Greek philosopher Hesiod, and thereafter similar notions appear at regular intervals in the history of ideas. Today, we are faced with a resurgence of such a set of beliefs. The library shelves now groan under the weight of books such as Offe's disappointing *Disorganised Capitalism* and Ingham's *Capitalism Divided?*; Gordon Reich and Edwards's *Segmented Work: Divided Workers* and Nichols and Armstrong's *Workers Divided*. The fragmentation theme is also present in the recent work of Harrison and Zeitlin (1985), Gorz (1976), Dex (1985), Abercrombie and Urry

(1983), Hyman and Price (1983) and Rueschemeyer (1986), to say nothing of Lash and Urry (1986), Pahl (1984), Roberts *et al.* (1977) and Massey (1984). All these texts and the attention they command reflect a widespread belief which gains more converts year by year: that the structure of the 'real world' is subject to a set of forces whose primary consequences are fragmentation and schism, disorganisation and fissure. How, then, does one explain the rise of this wave of anti-Modernist sympathy with its rejection of the assumption of a unity of the subject and a unity of history, its de-emphasis upon continuity and totalisation and its forsaking of the search for unification? A number of points are relevant here.

First, social science itself reflects a state of epistemological fragmentation. It has become a commonplace to assert that there now exists a plurality of competing and non-supportive theoretical frameworks from which 'the real world' might be viewed. The metaphor of 'The Tower of Babel' has been used by several writers (cf. Giddens, 1979) to describe the current situation of understanding in the social sciences in which (as Genesis tells us) we are seen as being faced by an incomplete intellectual structure, a diaspora of theory-builders to disparate and widely separated positions and a pronounced failure to speak or create a common conceptual language (Johnson *et al.*, 1984). It is not surprising, perhaps, that disciplinary fragments within the *Geistwissenschaften* should see the cultural and material objects of their studies as being fragmented too.

A second and related point, of course, concerns the status of the social sciences within Britain as a whole. Since 1979, sociopolitical events and processes have created a much more hostile environment in which social scientific activities have to take place. The emphasis upon 'relevant', pragmatically orientated work has reduced the theoretical space in which macro-social conceptualising can take place. The search is for manageable topics, not for totalisable problems. Those areas of social theory nurtured in the confident days of the 1960s and still active persist today in the face of government disinterest or even hostility.

A third element in the crisis of British 'culture' is located in the political sphere. The decline of two-party politics and the realignments which have taken place in centrist affiliations, the failure of the Left to provide a unified alternative programme and a general feeling of a great discontinuity in the development of democratic welfarism all produce a sense of political fragmentation and schism. Fourth, the slippage of the UK from a core position in the world economy to

something akin to semi-peripheral status carries with it critical changes in the structure of the economy, not least of which is reflected in the regional dimension.

Thus the unity of history provided by existing meta-narratives in political science and economics, for example, is difficult to grasp when so many events are witnessed which appear either to question the notion of the cohesive nation-state or produce effects which are inexplicable in Keynesian terms. Similarly the idea of progress cannot be gripped too tightly when the 1980s seem so like the 1930s and a privileged position for the subject is hard to maintain in times when so many forces seem politically irresistible. In sum, we live in an era when the term 'Enlightenment' does not strike one as particularly apt as a description and when Modernism appears to many as a bankrupt and hollow force.

As our review of Bravermania suggested, what has happened to labour process theory has to be understood not only in terms of its internal debates but also in this wider context of economic, political and epistemological fragmentation and the consequent decline of Modernism.

Living and writing in a past 'era' (within what Gordon, Edwards and Reich [1982: 12] call Phase IVA of the development of the US economy), Braverman sought, like Baran and Sweezy (1968), to further a Modernist approach to the understanding of labour through his provision of an integrating framework in which differences were submerged in the interests of a universally applicable grand theory. Post-Modernist projects, on the other hand, developing in more recent and depressed times, suggest that we celebrate the anarchic, the unusual, the colourful. Post-Modernism suggests that, in theory and in praxis, anything goes (Feyerabend, 1975). It hints that no standards of value are universally applicable. Like *Miami Vice* it thrives, say its critics, on pastiche and parody. Put more kindly, it seeks to inhabit and reveal the interstices left between rationality and performativity.

If my characterisation of the critique of Braverman which developed in Britain is accepted, then this critique is in no way a post-Modernist type. On the contrary, if one wishes to label the contingency approach of most labour process theory critique, it is of a decidedly pre-Modernist type. In the face of a Lyotard-type descent into anarchic, playful post-Modernism on one hand and a retreat into empiricist pre-Modernism on the other, the Modernist project stands in danger and therefore in need of protection.

The problem, as I see it, is to reject the pre-Modernism of much of the Braverman critique of the last decade. Then we need to recognise the existence and potency of the fragmentary forces at work within late capitalism but not, as post-Modernists do, fall victim to them in our own discourse. To this extent, I would seek to embrace a Modernist rather than a post-Modernist position. There is a need to seek out epistemological integration (of a limited and circumscribed kind, bounded ultimately by personal criteria) at the same time as one investigates ontological forces acting in the direction of increasing fragmentation. But where to begin? Entry cannot be at the level of labour process theory, for as a number of writers (e.g. Kelly, 1985) have noted, this set of notions already assumes a set of fissuring assumptions which hinder understanding at certain macro-levels of analysis. Braverman did not encompass a large enough canvas, for gender, the full circuit of capital, resistance and so on are missing from the picture. The sharp and dangerous fragments created by the separation of men from women, of labour from the processes of capital accumulation and of control from resistance all suggest that *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has to be carefully skirted if progress is to be made.

THE THEME OF FRAGMENTATION AS A UNIFIER

As Craib has recently noted (1984: 18) the only underlying theme in social theory seems to be that of fragmentation: 'the only thing that brings the different approaches together is that they are falling apart'. But in this paradox is the beginning of an approach to our present problems. It is my contention that through a focus upon fragmentation in the 'real world' we may come closer to a fruitful integration of our field of studies. For Craib, however, attempts at integration of this totalising kind are a waste of time. What is required is a recognition that the plurality of theories, perspectives and methodologies available represents a healthy state of affairs (Eldridge and Crombie, 1974). Where attempts to totalise are made, all that results is a new addition to an already fragmented science. Any new widely embracing schema such as labour process theory is but another framework to add to the list. But this fashionable position, for which Craib might expect much support, is flawed even in its own terms, for if a plurality of perspectives is 'healthy', then any attempts to add to the field must surely be welcomed. Thus from the logic of this stance

we should be encouraged to totalise if necessary rather than eschew theory-building altogether, so that the plurality of views may be maintained and enhanced.

THE ABSTRACT CATEGORY OF LABOUR

The beginning of an integrated framework of a Modernist type to the study of labour starts from a recognition of the processes of fragmentation in the capitalist world-system. To do this, some approach to the conceptualisation of the unit of analysis is required. The notion chosen here is that of *totality* as discussed and analysed in the recent work of Martin Jay (1984). This text represents a coherent and comprehensive review of the varieties of conceptualisations 'totality' has undergone and is suggestive of the schismatic tendencies within totalities themselves and of these same tendencies within the uses of the concept.

There are points we need to make early in our discussion of 'totality' which resonate back with Craib's pre-Modernist strictures against totalising attempts. 'Totality' has a special place in the lexicon of 'radical' theorists, but certain writers have linked it with totalitarianism and the suppression of non-orthodox or partial theories. Jay maintains, moreover, that those intellectuals who seek a totalistic perspective are those with free time, economic support, and a willingness to accept – indeed, claim – responsibility for unifying cultural symbols. They are likely to be marginal to their class of origin and have a cosmopolitan rather than provincial loyalty, both characteristics leading to a hermeticism and an inorganic relation to those for whom they speak. Yet other critics of the totalising attempt point to it as an infantile psychiatric disorder and not, therefore, the province of the fully mature theorist.

In the face of such criticisms, and of the recent rise of post-Modernism, it would be a brave person who would stand up and be counted as a totaliser. But we have to distinguish between those who harbour totalistic visions of some future, harmonious state of affairs in which alienation, atomisation and estrangement will all be banished (e.g. Habermas, 1979) and those who primarily wish to understand the contemporary social and material world holistically. The visionary and the methodological components of totality thinking can be and have to be separated.

Even where totalisation is viewed sympathetically however, problems arise. Jay, for example, maintains that:

Intellectuals in the Western Marxist tradition were particularly prone to think holistically. But if collectively drawn to the concept of totality they were by no means unified in their understanding of its meaning or in their evaluation of its merits. Indeed it might be said that the major subterranean quarrel of this subterranean tradition has been waged over this concept's implications. (Jay, 1984: 14)

Thus major questions hang over how the whole is to be conceived, what is its internal structure, how its boundaries may be understood, what is its relation to human agency and how its objective existence is captured in human thought. But at this point, disagreement begins and questions of interpretation start to loom large. Of key importance here, in addition to Marx himself, are Giambattista Vico and George Lukács.

Vico, a Neapolitan, published in 1725 *The New Science*, which although referenced only once in *Capital* is a book which many now accept had some influence on Marx. For Vico, the concept of totality was a historical category in which individual parts had to be understood as but constituents of a coherent whole. Unlike many of his contemporaries, he saw social institutions, not ideas, as the dominant elements of the totality. At the base of these institutions was human creativity – the key fact of the species being man's capacity to 'make'. This has become known as the *verum-factum* principle in which the 'true' and the 'made' are interchangeable. The totality thus becomes a human artifice made and remade by human beings through their productive activity.

It is relatively easy to find clear developments of Vico's perspective in the work of Marx wherever one looks, but to be accurate its presence is more noticeable in the 'early' works. According to Ollman (1971), Marx's use of the German word '*Arbeit*' covers both 'work and 'labour' and is seen as an expression of totality, encompassing within it a real organic whole. Although 'labour' is seen as an abstraction, covering productive activity in general, it expresses much more of the structured whole than precise 'bourgeois' segmentations of the totality. Labour, of course, is a relationship not a thing, and

within a full understanding of it is entailed not only the whole history of capitalism as a concrete coherent whole but also the relationship between humanity and nature. According to Meszaros (1971) the concept of labour in Marx is logically and historically prior to the concept of man. This priority is a relative one. Both belong to the same complex whole and neither can be abstracted without destroying the specific relationship as such.

Meszaros's interpretation clearly owes much to Vico when he maintains that for Marx the complex manifestations of human life, including their objectified and institutional forms, are explained as ultimately reducible to a dynamic principle: labour. Labour provides the conceptual bedrock upon which the division of labour, private property and exchange relationships rest – it is the only absolute factor in this whole complex. A similar view is taken by Walton and Gamble (1972) when they argue that the basic Marxian ontology rests upon labour. This concept is found to be central in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *Grundrisse* and *Capital*, and provides a unity running throughout Marx's work. Of course, this unity does not explain all situations but it provides the premisses from which such explanations must begin. Thus the relationship between human beings and society, for Marx and for Vico, is one of human activity, labour, creation and production. As Marx puts it in the 'Critique of the Gotha Programme', labour is 'the source of all wealth and all culture'. And it is from this materialist anthropology, typical of the early work, that George Lukács derived his inspiration.

As is well known, Lukács's later writings contain a fullish repudiation of the ideas contained in *History and Class Consciousness*, but as late as 1967 he maintained that he saw the role of the book in the reinstatement of the concept of totality to a central position in Marxism as a great achievement. 'Totality' has strong methodological overtones in Lukács's book, where it is seen as a Hegelian method creatively taken over by Marx. Hence Lukács maintained that 'the primacy of the category of totality is the bearer of the principle of revolution in science' (1967: 27). The concept of totality in which deeds, action and labour predominate therefore contains within it the ability to liberate our thinking and revolutionise our science, and of course, for Lukács it was the labouring classes, the producers, who were able to comprehend the totality as its active subjects. Following Vico's *verum-factum* principle, the proletariat made the totality so the proletariat would understand it. They would produce an adequate

theory which would be 'essentially the intellectual expression of the revolutionary process itself' (Lukács, 1967: 3).

The concept of totality used by Lukács at this point has been termed an *expressive totality* by several critics, for the whole is supposed clearly and unambiguously to express the intentionality and praxis of the creator in the material objects he/she/it/they produce. The object expresses the subject who created it and the subject is expressed in the object created. Capitalism has been created by the labouring classes and is a direct expression of their labours. The proletariat becomes, through its own consciousness, an identical subject-object whose resultant praxis will bring about the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. The Vico–Marx–Lukács line of argument asserts that the key ontological component of an expressive totality is human labour and activity. Without human labour the relationship between man and nature would cease and history would come to an end; without human labour there could be no human knowledge of the totality and of its structures and processes. Since human beings exteriorise themselves through labour into objects which are both material and intellectual, we are able to speak of the *dialectics of labour*.

Much criticism has been levelled at this kind of interpretation of the dialectics of labour and its role in totality thinking, from what Offe (1985) terms an 'anti-productionist' stance. First, it is open to the charge of infantile ultra-leftism in which the working class is elevated to a significance in revolutionary activity which it will 'never' be able to fulfil. Second, the 'expressive' orientation to the totality places tremendous reliance on members of the proletariat as creators of capitalism, and indeed all previous modes of production. Their centre-stage role as the totalisers of history is seen as suspect by many writers, not least of whom are members of the Frankfurt School.

For Adorno, in particular, truth could not be collapsed into class origin. Moreover, he saw the emphasis in this line of Marxism on labour and *workerism* as little more than an ascetic reflection of the bourgeois work ethic. In his view, where one finds that labour is given ontological priority, one finds an over-reliance on the virtues of *Arbeit*. Unsurprisingly, Horkheimer reiterated Adorno's criticisms, whilst for Habermas what the dialectics of labour perspective ignores was symbolically mediated interaction and the dialectical processes involved in language and speech. These two areas of human life are relatively autonomous and to focus on labour is to miss the symbolic

world of human discourse. For Foucault, meanwhile, the fetishisation of labour (in the Vico–Marx–Lukács line of descent) is all too symptomatic of the disciplining of the body which grew up in the last century or so (Foucault, 1977).

Third, several writers have pointed out that the concept of labour used in this perspective is metaphysical and abstract and gives very little by way of detailed directions in which analysis might proceed. For these critics the generic, all-embracing nature of the term means that it lacks concreteness. Finally, Nicholaus has argued that there exists

an amusing tendency, at least in academic circles known to me, to repeat an experiment Marx ventured when he was 26, namely to try to squeeze the concept of alienated labour hard enough to make all the categories of sociology, politics and economics come dripping out of it as if this philosopher's touchstone were a lemon. The drippings are flavourful but somewhat lacking in substance. (Nicholaus 1967: 43)

All this critique of what Habermas terms 'the epistemological dominance of labour' is powerful stuff, but does it mean we must abandon those versions of totality thinking which assert the primacy of labour? There are many reasons why premature abandonment of the totality–labour nexus should be resisted.

The point made by Habermas on the relative autonomy of the dialectics of labour from the dialectics of symbolic mediation is well taken, but the extent of this autonomy must be questioned. Speech is a form of activity involving the creative expenditure of energy. As such it is a form of '*Arbeit*' engaged in by intellectuals more than most. Moreover, the significance of language itself needs to be questioned, and particularly Habermas's rationalistic assumptions about its use (Jay, 1984: 508–9). Certainly if a focus upon labour leaves one open to the charge of workerism, a focus upon language in a non-distorted form permits the accusation of intellectualism and elitism (Held and Thompson, 1982).

It is also worthy of note that the 'workerism' inherent in the Vico–Marx–Lukács line of descent assumes an industrial imagery in which 'the worker' is equated with the industrial proletariat. Obviously, those who labour in the contemporary world-system need not (despite the historical focus of industrial sociology) match this stereotype of the factory hand (Hyman and Price, 1983). Recent

debates on the position of the middle class, the new working class, the role of unproductive labour, and so on all suggest that 'workerism' is no longer predominant as *the* class imagery. Even more compelling in this shift is the fact that it is much easier today to see that academics labour in ways which are not too dissimilar to many white-collar and professional employees whose relation to capital is less one of a functionary and more like that of a wage-labourer. Thus to assert the ontological primacy of labour is not to assert the primacy of factory production. Human activity extends from domestic non-paid labour through factory work to professional service (Pahl, 1984; Offe, 1985). All are forms of '*Arbeit*'.

Once labour is decoupled from an identity with a particular (segment of a particular) class – the industrial proletariat – both ultra-leftism and an expressive orientation to the totality become less problematic. The labouring population comes to represent a much more widely constituted social grouping than the First World War imagery of the proletariat promulgated by Lenin and Lukács, so that the 'revolutionary potential' can be invested in a much wider spectrum of labouring people. Similarly, the totality comes to be seen not as an expression of the *proletariat's* action (Gorz, 1982) but as decentred to the category of labour. 'Labour' seen abstractly, and not concretely identified as groups of labourers, forms the basic ontology of capitalism.

This raises the issue, of course, of what sort of abstract notion of 'labour' is being pointed to and what are its boundaries. It is important to note in the first place that the concept of labour is not the terminal point of analysis – it is the beginning. Used in the Vico–Marx–Lukács tradition it is an abstract category filled, as are all abstractions, with metaphysical assumptions, but it is also capable of concretisation, detailed development and theoretical expansion. Since it is presumed to be *the* ontological category of the totality, it cannot be meaningfully separated from many other aspects of contemporary capitalism. To talk of labour should be to talk of capital, of class, of politics, of revolution, of alienation. These are inherent in the relationship which is labour. What, then, is to be included in our analysis, and what can legitimately be excluded?

A number of elementary yet salient points are noteworthy. First, labour involves the expenditure of physical and mental effort by human beings. It would appear, therefore, that with one stroke we could exclude from the category of 'labour' a form of human existence which is known to us all – namely, sleep. Nevertheless,

before we consign the political economy of sleep to the status of irrelevancy it should be noted that sleep does involve the expenditure of small amounts of energy, that while we sleep we may engage in 'dream-work', and that the antipathy with which management regards 'sleeping on the job' suggests a sleep-labour dichotomy which could be of possible interest. Bearing this in mind, however, it seems safe for the moment to exclude slumber, approximately one-third of day-to-day human existence, from the category of labour.

Of course, what this point does highlight is the importance of the body to the notion of labour. The physiological, the physical and the mental attributes of the labourer do become relevant if one begins from the expenditure of energy by human beings. This does not mean that all such expenditure is 'labour' for we must exclude, from this category, the autonomic, 'instinctual', non-conscious aspects of biological life. Rather, labour involves conscious and purposive action which Marx's famous section on the human labour process when compared to the bee's (*Capital*, vol. 1: 174) highlights so well. It involves imagination, a capacity to invent and reinvent a future state of affairs; in short, a sense of purpose.

Second, labour is essentially interactive and social. The expenditure of energy undertaken in any one moment may appear individual and autonomous if viewed in isolation, but since it is purposive and future-orientated, other social beings are present – at least in the labourer's purpose and imagination. Labour often does involve the presence of others in real time and real space but even where others are absent, the labourer confronts a world, particularly a market, made by other social beings. More often than not, those who labour confront a world made for them by large numbers of other human beings as well as one pre-given by nature. However, not all purposive expenditure of energy by interacting human beings is 'labour'. Sexuality, and the sexual activity which it reflects, appear in most considerations to be excluded from the category of labour. But here again we need to pause briefly (Hearn and Parkin, 1987). Clearly, for some individuals sexual activity is a form of gainful employment and a source of economic agency. Whole industries rely upon this particular type of energy expenditure and it is a human activity (or set of activities) in which most of the adult population have a keen and prolonged interest. Thus the labour-sex opposition, which appears to parallel the more obvious work-leisure dichotomy (Deem, 1985), is a distinction which needs to be treated warily.

This being said, a third issue arises. Labour is conventionally conceptualised where the appropriation and alteration of natural substances and the resultant creation of use values is the key feature. Thus the notions of a real nature independent of human creation, and of real objects with a human use, are of central importance. Happily, sexual activity becomes difficult (though not impossible) to include within the category of labour on these grounds. However, also difficult to include on this basis is 'non-productive' expenditure of energy where no alteration of natural substances is achieved nor any real object produced.

Does this mean, then, that whole sectors of the contemporary economy are peopled by non-labourers (Poulantzas, 1975; Mandel, 1975; Hyman and Price, 1983)? Clearly, if we were to deny the label of 'labour' to white-collar, technical, supervisory or clerical or service staff we would be excluding from our analysis whole regiments of those whose work is organised in very similar ways to that of 'manual' productive, factory workers. The latter may be directly contributing to the *production* of surplus value, whereas the 'middle layers' (Braverman, 1974) are mere adjuncts to the *realisation* of surplus value, but Marx describes both sets of activity as 'labour'. Indeed, it would make little sense to exclude 'commercial labour' (*Capital*, vol. 3) from any analysis simply because it is non-productive of surplus value directly (Poulantzas, 1975). As Mandel has indicated, the problem here probably lies in inconsistencies in Marx's own writings (Mandel, 1975: 403). It is not sufficient, in any event, to identify labour with the alteration of natural substances into real objects with use value unless one is very careful and very catholic about what is meant by 'nature' and by 'real objects'. We have to be particularly wary of how we approach the issue of the human body and whether it is deemed to be a natural substance or a real object, or both or neither. We forget the 'raw materiality' of the body at our peril.

This set of points should help, in some ways at least, to concentrate our minds on sketching an adequate approach to labour. Any framework needs to relate, directly or indirectly, to the expenditure of physical energy by human beings for conscious, purposive ends. It needs to include the social, interactive dimension all 'labour' involves in producing material objects and non-material services with a use value. Such an approach needs to go beyond Poulantzas's cramped vision of 'labour' as only that which produces physical commodities with use values that increase material wealth. It needs to include

within its analytical remit the 'middle layers' of the occupational hierarchy; it must be able to exclude non-purposive actions, some forms of sexuality, sleep, and some forms of 'leisure'. It must be able to transcend the limitations of labour process theory and allow a full consideration of valorisation and the realisation of surplus value in the full circuit of capital. Bearing all this in mind, the abstract category of labour is seen here as a set of relations revolving around the expenditure of physical energy by human beings in the production of commodities (whether material, non-material or their own bodies) for exchange on a market in which the realisation of surplus value might take place. These relations are dynamic and are subject to antagonistic contradictions of differing severity which produce perceptible fragmentations within 'labour'.

THE INTEGRATORY RELEVANCE OF THE ABSTRACT CATEGORY OF 'LABOUR'

In brief, there are a number of programmatic points that are perhaps worth making, as we slowly crawl from the wreckage (Thompson, in this volume). First, the body of literature which has now developed on the theme of fragmented labours cannot be allowed to dissipate and go to waste. There is a real need to integrate this material, which ranges from a concern for the spatial divisions of labour (Massey, 1984; Froebel *et al.*, 1980) to debates on the significance of the labouring aristocracy in a given period (Harrison and Zeitlin, 1985); from the sexual division of work (Dex, 1985) to the problem of the middle classes (Abercrombie and Urry, 1983). Any synthesis of such disparate material, itself subject to a division of labour (Pahl, 1984) and originating from within many theoretical spaces, may prove impossible. But the effort – for pedagogic reasons, if for no other – must surely be worthwhile. No doubt we would disagree on the frameworks adopted, argue over the basic categories of analysis used, and question all comparisons, classifications and integrative strategies developed outside our own 'paradigm'. Such is the stuff of which social science is made. Nevertheless a review – any review – of these texts and the other material mentioned earlier is urgently required.

In my view, this task of *textual* integration might be better facilitated by a comparison of the abstract category of labour developed above with how 'labour' is seen by the relevant authors.

This, it must be said, is but *one* strategy, for Modernism does not necessarily imply academic imperialism. Second, there is the issue of *conceptual* integration. The student of industrial organisation today confronts a bewildering plethora of conceptualisations, all based to varying degrees on assumptions about the nature of labour. We have before us labour and labour power, labour process and labour markets, the labour aristocracy and the labour force, dialogical and monological forms of labour, the division of labour and the political parties of labour, domestic labour and the reserve army of labour; we confront homogenised labour and segmented labour. And so the list grows alarmingly. The notion of labour is thus of paramount importance to much of what we study. If we are to privilege it in such a way, then it is best we know why. If we are to depend upon it for so much, then it is best we know if it will stand the strain. It is true that the notion of labour process has been found wanting, but there is still room for optimism of a kind.

If, on the other hand, we are to pin our hopes on a dialectical analysis of production, of control, or of struggle (Storey, 1985; Edwards; Wardell; Willmott; all in this volume) based on the interpenetration of the opposites of capital and labour, then it behoves us to know the precise nature of the original categories from which our analysis starts. Otherwise we shall never know when synthesis has been achieved, for we shall not know from what position we started. Dialecticians will be faced by a situation not so much of the choice implied by the 'road not taken' (Wardell, in this volume) but by the ignorance implied by 'on what road have we come'? This is the issue, then, of *analytical integration* and of placing texts and concepts in some larger, dynamic framework. As the highest-order level of complexity, it should be obvious that such a framework will prove difficult to develop.

In all three aspects of the Modernist task – textual integration, conceptual integration and analytical integration – it seems that we must invest some time in going back to first principles, although in so doing we must recognise that this is not an end in itself but a necessary preliminary to the subsequent concretisation of our work. The crisis in labour process theory affords us this opportunity to rethink the vehicles of our imagination. It happily permits us to seek out better meta-narratives, not because they will be believed by all who hear them but because they excite, titillate and amuse small numbers of interested parties.

In the same way as the 'action approach' of Goldthorpe and

In the same way as the 'action approach' of Goldthorpe and Lockwood succumbed to critique and the passage of time, so too labour process theory faces inevitable decay. Students of industrial organisation have now heard both these stories (and have reacted with differing degrees of interest), but as classic narratives they no longer put bums on seats. Given this, even the pre-Modernist majority must see the need for something else against which they might fruitfully react. The form the next meta-narrative will take remains unclear to me, but what *is* apparent is that a new unifying story with wide appeal is urgently required.

Thus to speak in support of Modernism is to advocate the search for a grand meta-narrative, but this is not to say that post-Modernism and its strictures should be ignored. We must permit the possibility that the development of 'meta-narratives', loosely in the Braverman tradition, could be enhanced considerably by the post-Modernist critique, not least by the 'fact' that now at least we know of their putative existence. Bearing this in mind, it is my sincere hope that the next few years in our discipline will see the writing of at least one really good story and a decline of interest in matters of what amounts to punctuation.

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10 Subjectivity, Power and the Labour Process¹

David Knights

The primary aim of this chapter is to develop a critical analysis of the labour process which resists the dualistic tendencies to perceive social reality in terms of a binary opposition between voluntary subjects, on the one hand, and objective structures, on the other. It is therefore concerned to challenge theoretical constructions that *reduce* the complexity of social life into a polarisation where the 'free', expressive and creative actions of voluntary subjects are seen to be struggling against, or determined by, the oppressive forces of objective structures and reality. No doubt part of the attraction of labour-process theory, as espoused both by Braverman and his critics, has been this comparatively simple view of society and the human subjects that constitute it. Still, in the almost frenzied critical outpourings that have acquired the ironic label 'Bravermania' (Littler and Salaman, 1984), it is not surprising to find some that condemn Braverman's neglect of the subject (Aronowitz, 1978; Elger, 1979; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Littler and Salaman, 1982). Most of these criticisms, however, have either failed to offer any alternative or, in subscribing to a conception of the subject as active individual or class agent struggling against power, tend to reproduce the agency-structure dualism that this chapter seeks to transcend. Evidence of the lack of development in this sphere is captured by Thompson (in this volume) when he argues that 'the construction of a full theory of the *missing subject* is probably the greatest task facing labour-process theory'.

Almost all the critiques of Braverman are critical either of his tendency to exaggerate or neglect crucial elements of Marx's work, or of a failure to capture the full significance of developments that have taken place since the late nineteenth century. So, for example, it is claimed that little or no attention is given to the uneven historical development of capitalism (Elger, 1979; Littler, 1982), class struggle and conflict (Aronowitz, 1978; Edwards, 1978; Elger, 1979; Gartman, 1979; Stark, 1980) and the contradictions in the development of

the real subordination of labour (Palmer, 1975; Brighton Labour Process Group, 1977; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Storey, 1983). On the other hand, Braverman is seen to neglect the diverse and sophisticated character of management control as it responds not only to technological advance but also to changes in the degree and intensity of worker resistance and new product and labour-market conditions (Gorz, 1976; Friedman, 1977; Ramsay, 1977; Burawoy, 1979; Nichols, 1980; Littler, 1982, Knights and Collinson, 1985). He is also seen as having a restricted view of gender relations in the labour process (Philips and Taylor, 1978; West, 1982; Beechey, 1982; Knights and Collinson, 1985; Davies and Rosser, 1985), of the complex character of skill as socially as well as technically constructed (Rubery, 1980; Humphries, 1980; Pollert, 1981;) and of the impact of the international dimension in terms of the division of labour (Gorz, 1976; Elson, 1979; Hoogvelt, 1982, 1987) and product-market competition (Littler, 1985; Knights and Collinson, 1987). Only a more adequate concept of the subject, I argue, could retrieve the debate from this 'crisis' (Storey, 1985; Salaman, 1986; Thompson, in this volume) of critique² and facilitate the development of a labour process theory that can readily encompass an understanding of consent as much as resistance, gender and race as well as class, and market forces at the same time as relations at the point of production.

The first section of the chapter concentrates on the neglect or inadequate treatment of the subject in labour process theory. It deals first with the implicit assumptions about human nature that, despite his avoidance of the subject, can be detected in Braverman's thesis. This gives way to an attempted explanation of the resistance of authors to provide an analysis of the subject, and the negative effects of this on their declared intention to eliminate determinism from labour process theory. While recognising that there is a valid fear of escaping determinism only to fall into the trap of voluntarism, the failure to analyse the subject results in an equally unacceptable form of dualistic analysis in which the relationship between structure and agency is, at best, theorised within a mechanistic dialectic. Before attempting to 'bring back in' a conception of the subject, the second section of the chapter applies this critique directly to an examination of Cressey and MacInnes (1980), who claim specifically to be concerned with taking labour process theory beyond a determinist-voluntarist dualism. The third section then focuses on two important ethnographies in the labour process literature – Burawoy (1979) and Cockburn (1983) – both of whom give evidence of the impor-

tance of subjective identity. This gives way to a not entirely uncritical examination of Foucault's analysis of power and subjectivity, paying special attention to the issues of control and resistance which are central to labour process theory.³ Finally, in a concluding section, the importance of drawing upon phenomenological and existential perspectives in theorising the subject is reviewed in the context of labour process analysis and some of the issues discussed in the chapter.

THE NEGLECT OF THE SUBJECT IN LABOUR PROCESS THEORY

After a brief flirtation with theorising human nature and the subject in his early writings on alienation, Marx refrained from this kind of speculative philosophy to concentrate on what he considered to be the more objective scientific study of capitalist political economy. The theory of the labour process was an integral part of *Capital* and, as Aronowitz (1978: 140) has argued, while it might not have been his intention, one result of Marx's analysis in this sphere 'has been to abolish the possibility for a theory of subjectivity'. But Braverman's justification for excluding the subjective dimension from his analysis is based more on what he sees as the effects of its inclusion within industrial sociology where managerialist assumptions have resulted in theories which help to sustain or elaborate, rather than undermine, systems of management control. Notwithstanding Aronowitz's extreme pessimism, the misuse of the so-called subjective dimension in industrial sociology is not a reason for excluding it from an analysis of the labour process. Rather, it is precisely the stimulant that is needed for developing a concept of subjectivity that supersedes the objectivist and empiricist contributions of managerialist sociology.

Despite an explicit refusal to theorise subjectivity, however, Braverman is no exception in holding tacitly to certain assumptions about human nature.⁴ In particular, he subscribes to Marx's early writings where labour is defined as that relationship between women/men and nature which involves a transformation of both. Through the act of labour, nature is transformed into the means of subsistence and men/women are humanised as they engage in creative self-expression. It is the alienation of the specifically capitalist labour process which renders work '*external* to the worker . . . not a part of

his nature, that consequently he does not fulfil himself in his work but denies himself' (Marx, 1973: 110). Although implicit in the whole of his work, this expressivist conception of human nature was given less attention as Marx developed his thesis in a more sociological rather than psychological manner. By focusing on 'commodity fetishism' rather than alienation, he showed how capitalist production has the effect of obscuring the *social* character of human labour. As he puts it in *Capital*, production for exchange generates 'a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx, 1971: 43).

By contrast, Braverman pays very little attention to the way in which capitalism conceals from labour the crucially social character of the process. Instead, he focuses principally on the deskilling of labour and the intensification of management control. Illustrative of this is his assertion that the goal of management is 'the displacement of labor as the subjective element of the labor process and its transformation into an object' (Braverman, 1974: 180). A prevalent perspective in the labour process literature, this dualistic conception of subjective action as that which is voluntary (or freely chosen), in contrast to objective behaviour that is determined or controlled, is the central focus of the present critique. Within Braverman it reflects and reinforces an indisputably humanistic perspective which leads him to condemn machinery because it is used *not* for purposes of 'humanity' but for those of control (ibid.: 193; emphasis added). Further evidence of this humanism surfaces in Braverman's romantic conception of craft work, its importance in history and his view that the modern labourer has become increasingly deprived of his or her skill and humanity. As yet, the challenge to the empirical validity of these views has continued without a rejection of the humanistic assumptions that invoke them. So, for example, it is argued that not only was the nineteenth-century craft worker probably much less skilled than Braverman imagined (Cutler, 1978) but changes in the contemporary labour process have frequently involved a re-skilling as well as a deskilling of tasks (Knights *et al.*, 1985). A major problem with the whole of the deskilling thesis, it may be argued, is that it concentrates attention on the relationship between the individual labourer and the task rather than upon the specifically *social* organisation of production. In this sense it reflects and reinforces the individualisation of labour, thus deflecting the theoretical focus away from disclosing its subjugating effects – an issue which is taken up later in this chapter.

In so far as it is historically inaccurate (Cutler, 1978), there is general consent in rejecting Braverman's romantic conception of craft work, but its theoretical derivation in the philosophical anthropology of the early Marx seems merely to be noted in passing. Certainly, criticisms which identify the problem as merely one of failing to examine the actual historical development of capitalism (Cutler, 1978; Littler, 1982) are clearly not questioning Braverman's humanism. It is plausible, however, to suggest that the romantic notion of craft work in Braverman is directly a result of his adoption of the more essentialist aspects of Marx's philosophical anthropology displayed, for example, in the latter's description of industry as the '*exoteric revelation of man's essential powers*' (Marx, 1973: 143). This was a part of Marx's belief that human nature could be realised only in the transformation of nature through labour (Marx, *EPM*, quoted in Bottomore and Rubel, 1967: 89). Combined with a general anathema towards psychological theorising (cf. Fromm, 1973; Seve, 1978; Leonard, 1984), this implicit humanism partly explains the diversion of Marxists from reflecting seriously on the concept of the subject.⁵

To the extent that Marx's philosophical anthropology is essentialist in treating humanity as wholly dependent on the individual interacting with nature and transforming it, through labour, into useful objects, it has to be discarded. For Marx was engaged here in collapsing a material necessity in terms of species survival (transformation of nature) into a psychological or spiritual necessity for the individual (labour as expressive of essential being). Whether or not Marx himself could be interpreted as having discarded the essentialist theory of human nature will continue to be open to dispute.⁶ In his later writings he certainly redirects his attention away from the view of labour as expressive of what it is to be human to a concentration on how the capitalist demand for surplus value through exchange transforms the *social* relation of production into the appearance of a relationship between the commodities that are their outcome. In other words, whereas Marx examines capitalism from the position of the labouring subject in his early work, capital is the principal focus of the later theorising. Whatever else is achieved by this redirection, however, it is not one of conceptualising subjectivity. Yet in defending Marx from any attack of inconsistency, many authors (Ollman, 1971; McLellan, 1971; Meszaros, 1970; Boreham and Dow, 1980; Neimark and Tinker, 1986) fail to expose the inadequacy of both the humanist and the structuralist position. They seem content to argue

for the lack of inconsistency between these separate positions, given a 'philosophy of internal relations' (Ollman, 1971), to which Marx can clearly be held to subscribe.

While this is not the place to engage in a debate on the philosophy of internal relations, some clarification is required. Ollman (1971) argues that one reason why Marx is difficult to understand is because of the philosophy of internal relations wherein 'the sense of "relation" itself has been extended to cover what is related, so that either term may be taken to express both in their peculiar connection' (ibid.: 26). As a result, Marx used the same concept to refer to different things as when he describes (ibid.: 10) 'religion, family, state, law, morality, science, art, etc.' as particular 'modes of production' and often different expressions for what are ordinarily thought of as the same things. Indeed, this confusing use of terms is part of Marx's solution to the problem of language being too static and analytical to cope with the dynamic and dialectical world of social reality. Mutual interdependence is implicit in all the phenomena to which Marx gives expression, so that although, in *Capital* 1, he gives the impression of labour being dominated by capital (something that Braverman tends to take too literally), this is only a result of his concern to document one side of the relation in order to provide a full account of the development of contemporary capitalism. Braverman, unfortunately, concentrates on this one-sided account without either recognising that it is simply a specific emphasis for a particular purpose or acknowledging the philosophy of internal relations upon which all Marx's work is grounded.

Apart from the confusion caused by analyses which, rather than clarifying and simplifying, re-present the ambiguity and complexity of social life, such semantic manipulations do not overcome the major weakness of Marxism – the failure to develop a non-essentialist conception of subjectivity. This, however, is not to deny the contribution of Marx's structuralist analysis which, because of its importance to labour process theory, I now briefly summarise.

Marx's view of how capitalism has developed demands that primary attention be given to the structure in order to uncover what has become obscured as a result of a fundamental inversion between labour and capital. That is to say, after writing the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* he defines the central problem as one of exposing how actual concrete material and social relations of production are rendered subordinate to the appearance of them in abstract relations of property and exchange.

The complexity of capitalism as an economic and social structure completely justifies Marx's concern to penetrate its functioning and, in particular, its contradictions, for he could not envisage the social form of property relations continuing to dominate the material – or what he describes as the 'real' – social relations of production upon which human beings as a species depend for their survival and reproduction.⁷ Two fundamental but interrelated contradictions suggested to Marx that capitalist expansion would eventually meet its limits, both structurally and socially. First, competition and capital intensification continually eroded the rate of increase of capitalist profits upon which the reproduction of private property relations depended. Second, as a consequence, capitalism demands an ever-increasing intensification of – and private appropriation of surplus value from – production that is increasingly socialised through the interdependence of labour under large-scale enterprise. Structurally, then, the increasing ratio of capital to labour as new technology became available would reduce the rate of profit, thus rendering the intensification of labour even greater. Socially, however, the combined conditions of exploitation within a framework of the interdependence and solidarity of labour provide ideal conditions for collective resistance to capitalist oppression.

Marxists have rationalised the failure of proletarian revolution by resort to various explanations, prominent amongst which are the internationalisation of capital, consumerism, reformist political parties and trade unions, and the public provisions of the welfare state. Yet despite Marx's insistence that the structural contradiction would result in the overthrow of private property *only* once the proletariat became constituted as a class-for-itself, few Marxist writers – with minor exceptions, including recent labour process theorists – have felt any necessity to examine the constitution of subjectivity. Within labour process theory, this is partly due to the failure of Braverman's critics to question his implicit assumptions about the subject.

Consequently labour process theory has been inclined to a view – albeit not always articulated – of subjectivity as representing the productive and autonomous aspects of human existence, which are to be contrasted with the objective structures that constrain them. In pursuit of capitalist surplus, these structures are seen to direct and distort the *creative* potential of individual subjects and collective agency. As has been suggested already, this dualism between the creative subject and the constraining object is unhelpful, since it fails to capture the social character of relations, practices and institutions.

Its adoption, however, helps to explain the failure of an adequate account of why the proletariat is incapable of developing a consciousness even remotely favourable to overthrowing the capitalist class, let alone of advancing social relations appropriate to socialism. Critical questioning of this kind points to the necessity for an analysis of the subject that goes beyond current Marxist thinking. Unfortunately, labour process analyses have deflected the concern by a fear of sliding into voluntarism – a fear that has continued to dominate the literature even when Braverman's determinism has been the main target of criticism.⁸ In the remainder of this section, the analysis suggests that the fear of voluntarism and/or the preoccupation with dialectics has prevented the development of an adequate conception of the subject.

DUALISM: THE FAILURE OF DIALECTICS IN LABOUR PROCESS THEORY

Despite the heavy criticism of Braverman's account of the logic of capital and the continuous extension of management control, the concern to avoid voluntarist arguments has prevented labour process theory from developing beyond an articulation, rather than a resolution, of excessive determinism. Consequently, a plurality of determining forces such as new technology (Noble, 1979), international competition (Littler, 1982, 1985), state intervention (Hopper *et al.*, 1986; Willmott, 1985) and the restructuring of organisations either internally through adopting the multidivisional form (Coyle, 1983) or externally by extending multinational operations (Elson, 1979; Littler and Salaman, 1982) have been seen to impact on the labour process. Generally, these developments are seen either to carry with them new 'built-in' systems of control at the point of production or to relegate the importance of control issues to the periphery of managements' concerns (Child, 1985). In short, there are numerous determinants in the control of the labour process, some of which may be a fortuitous, though not directly intended, consequence of other management objectives (for example, participating in or seeking to control competition in product markets). Although recognising that management control is far more complex than Braverman would have it, these theorists merely substitute a multiplicity of determinants of the labour process for his crude monocausal determinism. Rarely does their theorising extend to an analysis of the subject and subjectivity except in so far as they give some attention to managerial strategy

(Friedman, 1977; Thurley and Wood, 1983; Knights and Willmott, 1985, 1986).

Other groups of theorists, on the other hand, have operated from an assumption that a development of the neglected subjective dimension in Braverman merely necessitates outlining how workers are involved in 'class' struggles and negotiations (Aronowitz, 1978; Palmer, 1975; Nichols and Beynon, 1977; Elger, 1979; Littler and Salaman, 1982; Knights and Collinson, 1985). Reducing the subjective dimension to an analysis of labour resistance, however valuable in its own right, has the unintended effect of replacing Braverman's determinism with a *control-resistance dualism* or paradigm (Wardell, in this volume). Wardell's contribution is to identify the limitations of reducing subjectivity to resistance, as is the tendency in much labour process literature (for example, Gorz, 1976; Ramsay, 1977, 1985; Edwards, 1979; Zimbalist, 1979; Stark, 1980; Storey, 1983).⁹ I am not convinced, however, that he has taken the analysis much further than the 'dual character' or dialectical thesis to which I now turn.

Returning to the emphasis placed by Marx on the dialectical nature of the labour process, Cressey and MacInnes (1980), who might be seen as the leading exponents of this thesis, show how management and workers are involved in relations not only of conflict and antagonism but also of co-operation and mutual dependence. This they attribute to the twofold relationship between capital and labour. At the level of exchange value, control over the product of labour is removed from the workers as they are continually reduced to the status of commodities; for purposes of use value, however, capital must seek to develop labour as a subjective force (*ibid.*: 15). A parallel contradictory relationship occurs in respect of labour since it seeks 'to resist its subordination to the goal of valorisation through the reduction of labour to a pure commodity' (*ibid.*) yet reinforces its own commodity status when bargaining for wages. At the same time it has an interest in the 'maintenance of capital' (*ibid.*) if only for purposes of job security, and will help to develop 'the forces of production within the factory' (*ibid.*), often correcting for the mistakes made by the agents of capital (Burawoy, 1979; Knights and Collinson, 1985).

It is the failure to recognise this dual character and the associated contradictions internal to the real subordination of labour (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980: 11) that leads to a 'sterile polarisation' between an approach which sees labour as continuously 'incorporated' through its real subordination and the contrasting view of succeeding

worker demands ultimately eroding the managerial prerogatives of capitalist control (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980: 6). Seeking an escape from this dualism or 'debilitating bifurcation' (ibid.: 5), Cressey and MacInnes understand the labour process as a 'joint creation, the outcome of class struggle rather than the "logic" of capitalist development' (ibid.: 19–20). They conclude their paper by arguing that any adequate strategy for labour

must go beyond simple 'refusal' and blanket support for militancy or the more exotic forms of resistance to work that workers practice. It must be capable of raising the nature of work and its purpose, with the aim of developing political prefigurative forms within capitalism that point beyond it rather than patch it up. (ibid.: 22)

As Cressey and MacInnes correctly argue, 'the categories to develop such a strategy have yet to be produced' (ibid.) and their own contribution is limited to *stripping away* from labour process theory categories that leave labour impotent, relegated to the passivity of having to await the development of class-consciousness or of capitalism 'digging its own grave'. The question to be asked, though, is why, given labour's real participation in the labour process, so few examples of 'prefigurative forms that point beyond' capitalism are to be found? Only a more adequate analysis of subjectivity could lead us in the direction of an answer, but unfortunately Cressey and MacInnes's analysis of the dual character of the capital-labour relation does not extend to a discourse on subjectivity. Rather, they draw on precisely the conception of the subject that reflects and reproduces the 'debilitating bifurcation' (1980: 5) which their paper seeks to escape.

This occurs because of a failure to examine subjectivity in the same rigorous and critical fashion as political economy. So whilst acknowledging their contribution to concretising the abstractions in Marxism by focusing on the 'historical materialism of workplace struggle' (1980: 19), Cressey and MacInnes have to be subjected to the same criticism as was directed at humanistic Marxism in regard to their conception of the subject. For in treating the subjective simply as that which represents the autonomous and creative aspects of human life (ibid.: 9, 13, 16), they fall into the dualistic trap of pitting and polarising a voluntaristic subject against a determining structure or object.¹⁰ This is exactly the false antinomy that leaves us with

localised 'job-control' theories of socialism, on the one hand, and transcendental 'global-revolution' theories, on the other. Despite recognising the absurdity of a completely objectified conception of labour in which it is entirely subordinated to the production of exchange value, the reduction of subjectivity to creative autonomy denies Cressey and MacInnes the potential to eradicate the dualism between voluntarism and determinism or concrete and abstract theory.

It is not difficult to trace the source of the 'debilitating bifurcation' to this conception of subjectivity, for creative autonomous subjects are seen as separated off from – and in danger of being alienated by – the determining controls of society as an objective reality. Humanistic socialists, then, emphasise the creative power of the autonomous subject, and scientific socialists the crushing impact of the capitalist reality. Paradoxically, the 'collective' philosophy of Marxism disintegrates into either a 'romantic' individualism or a reification whereby the reality of capitalism is confused with 'the fetish that it throws up' (ibid.: 13). Although Cressey and MacInnes are efficient in their dismissal of the latter formalism, their failure to theorise the subject renders them powerless to deal adequately with the opposite 'workerist' tendency of romanticising labour. Critical though they are of labour process theory subscribing to an idea of the social form (that is, relations of production and exchange value) completely dominating material relations (that is, forces of production and use value), Cressey and MacInnes seem oblivious to the implication of treating subjectivity and control synonymously. So, for example, when Braverman (1974: 171–2) speaks about 'management as the sole subjective element', they question not the *conceptual* but the empirical accuracy of the view. Consequently, they argue, 'to develop the forces of production capital must seek to develop labour as a *subjective force*' (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980: 15; emphasis added) as if subjectivity and productivity were one and the same thing. Empirically, capitalism does advance by continually revolutionalising the forces of production, which include the development of the productive power of labour, but what is to be questioned is the view that subjectivity is an 'optional' property of the person capable of being possessed or dispossessed, developed or left undeveloped.

It is inevitable that once the theorist slides into identifying subjectivity with creativity, autonomy or being in control, there is posited a determinative structure or force against whose 'powers' the subject struggles to retain its own autonomy. But it makes no more sense to

speak of an autonomous subject (even relatively) than to think of structures independently of their constitution through subjects and their practices. Subjects are as much constituted as constituting and structures are mere institutionalised outcomes of the aggregated practices of historical and contemporary subjects. Necessarily, structures depend for their reproduction on social practices that reflect and reinforce both the constituted and self-constituting character of subjects. It is therefore quite misleading to suggest that 'even the smallest degree of subjectivity and detailed control of the direction of the process by labour can be used as a weapon against capital' (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980: 14) since such a perspective cannot grasp how subjects continuously constitute practices through the vehicle of a self- and socially constituted subjectivity which is itself a partial product of those practices. Of course, no practice develops independently of the global powers and strategies that may embrace and/or colonise the more localised or less aggregated practices. Yet what has to be recognised is that no matter how global, aggregated power and knowledge is exercised, reproduced or transformed through precisely similar subjectivity-imbued mechanisms as those social practices and relations of a more localised character.

To sum up, then: despite an urge to depart from 'bifurcated' or dualistic conceptualisations, Cressey and MacInnes's limited or unreflected assumptions concerning the human subject result in an analysis which slides easily into voluntarism as the only concrete escape from the abstract determinism which is the focus of their critique. In this respect, their analysis does not extend itself much beyond those theorists discussed earlier who seem to believe that the mere acknowledgement of a subjective dimension is equivalent to an analysis of subjectivity. For when subjectivity is reduced to a conception of human creativity and autonomy, any release from the excessive determinism of much Marxist labour process theory is achieved ultimately only by reverting to the voluntarist side of the action-structure dualism. At the very best, it sustains an uneasy yet mechanistic dialectic between the two polarities of the dualism. Either way, it represents little improvement upon the structural determinism that labour process theory is concerned to replace. Although not necessarily 'subjectivity-blind', it has to be concluded that labour process theory is myopic in regard to a concept of the subject. Moreover, it is likely to remain so unless analysis can extend beyond the kind of reductionism that treats subjectivity either as that which merely generates an ideological distortion of 'real' interests or

as the creative, autonomous or expressive aspects of human nature assumed to be obscured or constrained by structures of power and wealth.

BRINGING THE SUBJECT BACK IN – BURAWOY AND COCKBURN

In concentrating on a theoretical contribution to the dualistic problem in the labour process debate, it may not be surprising to find the kinds of weaknesses illustrated, for theoretical discourse tends to rationalise away the 'lived experience' of subjectivity through arguments that rely upon formal categories and abstract typifications. By way of compensation this section examines two of the more outstanding empirical ethnographies within the labour process literature which focus upon workers as subjects – respectively as 'self-organising' (Burawoy, 1979) and as 'gendered' (Cockburn, 1983) subjects. Both studies capture the tensions and contradictions of working on the shop floor and the dialectic of capitalist-labour relations, but neither fully satisfies the analytical problem of accounting respectively for class and gender inequality.

Burawoy's concern is to explain how capitalism has been able continuously to secure increasing volumes of surplus value at one and the same time as it obscures the precise exploitative character of its control over the labour process. His explanation revolves around an account that provides sound empirical evidence to contradict Braverman's thesis of labour intensification resulting from the increase of management control and the separation of conception and execution. For Burawoy (1979: 72) finds that what really is effective in generating and yet obscuring the production of surplus value is an 'expansion of the area of the "self-organisation" of workers as they pursue their daily activities'. It is the relaxation of management control (*ibid.*: 176), within the context of the evolution of an elaborate, shop-floor-induced 'game' of 'making-out' (that is, maximising bonus pay-out), that ensures high levels of productivity. By utilising their 'tacit' skills (Manwaring and Wood, 1985), workers sustain production through subverting rules, creating informal alliances and modifying machinery and methods often against – and despite frequent disruptions stemming from the inefficiencies of – formal management (Burawoy, 1979: 174–6; also Knights and Collinson, 1985).

In this analysis Burawoy stresses how the significance of these culturally embellished shop-floor practices extends well beyond the 'particularities of making-out', for the mere playing or involved participation in the game has the effect of generating harmony and consent as to its rules and objectives. Conflicts are deflected horizontally across the organisation, and away from the conventional class antagonisms, as individuals or groups are seen as disruptive of the game's progress. What guarantees the securing, whilst obscuring, of the production of surplus value is absorption in the game and the sense of autonomy and choice that labour experiences in playing it. It is for this reason that – despite the contradiction here between the productive forces (socialised production) and the relations that ultimately control them (capital and its agents) – the self-organisation of workers around the norms of production cannot be seen as an example of a prefigurative form of socialism. For although it is management's profit interest which requires it to assert an authority that is disruptive of productive power on the shop floor, making-out does not reveal to workers how they contribute to their own exploitation by participating in these games.

Burawoy's analysis of subjectivity, however, does not indicate what constitutes the failure of workers to penetrate some of the contradictions of their own self-discipline. Let us be clear: the recognition that interests and ideology are constituted on the shop floor and are not simply a result of class structures or external agencies of socialisation represents a vast improvement on previous studies of industrial workers, for the latter either deny the importance of the subject (Braverman, 1974) or *reduce* subjectivity to attitudes or orientations to work (Goldthorpe *et al.*, 1970). But Burawoy fails to theorise subjectivity or identity sufficiently to account for the workers' preoccupation with production output at Allied Corporation. His analysis of the game of making-out is not so much wrong as incomplete.

At a fairly superficial level, it is incomplete in that while refusing to impute a given (class-conscious) set of interests to labour because 'exploitation and unpaid labour' are not part of their lived experience on the shop floor (1979: 29), Burawoy does not apply the same caution to theorising management. Indeed, he sees no difficulty in attributing to all management (despite competing fractions) the shared common 'interest in securing and obscuring surplus value' (*ibid.*: 190). To be consistent, Burawoy would at least have needed to investigate how this interest and ideology are generated and repro-

duced within the everyday life of managerial work.¹¹ So, for example, although it can be seen how managers might develop an interest in promoting surplus value as a means of securing, advancing or merely justifying their position in the career hierarchy, attributing them with an interest in obscuring the production of surplus is tantamount to proffering a conspiratorial theory of capitalist organisation. Moreover, if Burawoy's analysis of the development of workers' consent to the production of profit as an integral element of their game-like lived experience on the shop floor is correct, such conspiratorial interests would be completely superfluous. A more serious weakness, however – which Burawoy shares with the early Marx and with much of labour process theory – is a tendency to fall back upon an essentialist theory of human nature. Here he assumes that the absence of conditions through which to express 'the potentiality in the human species' (*ibid.*), is experienced as a deprivation for which compensation must be sought by constituting 'work as a game' (*ibid.*: 199; see Willmott, in this volume).

Once having interpreted the limited choices within game-playing as providing compensation for a deprived human nature, Burawoy has 'closed off' any further analysis of subjectivity. In this respect he simply sustains a major weakness in labour process theory: precisely this failure to investigate the subjectivity that often (though not always) manifests itself in attempts by both management and workers to control their work situation so as to secure some measure of personal space and autonomy. Reflected in shop floor restrictions of output, building up a 'kitty' so as to have completed work in reserve, clearing backlogs or management setting targets beyond realistic expectations and engaging in creative accounting in order to display results in the best light, these practices are all aimed at reducing the uncertainty of conditions surrounding the subject.

To what, then, can this concern to control or reduce the uncertainty of situations be attributed if not to the expression of some fundamental 'species essence' (Burawoy, 1979: 157)? It is not that Burawoy completely neglects what is involved; he just fails to develop his account of how labour processes fragment, atomise and turn workers into individuals rather than members of a class. While many of our contemporary institutions have similar individualising effects, labour process practices tend to exacerbate them, thereby reinforcing the individual's preoccupation with control and the reduction of uncertainty. For targets and bonus schemes, wage differentials and career systems all have the effect of separating

individuals off from one another and turning them back in on themselves. In such circumstances of comparative social isolation, subjects become more vulnerable to external threats to their own symbolic if not actual material survival and the biological space they occupy is readily conflated with the social sense of what it is to be a person. That is to say, subjects become wholly preoccupied with accumulating material and symbolic supports for their own individual existence. The pursuit of economic wealth/power and both institutional and interpersonal confirmation of identity begin to dominate social life and especially the labour process, since that is where the competition over material and symbolic resources is most prevalent.

Generally, for those on the shop floor, there are few opportunities to secure wealth and/or an elevated identity, and subordination erodes the very dignity of what it is to be an independent subject with individual rights and responsibilities. A common response of subordinate workers, therefore, is to distance themselves mentally from those conditions of domination that contradict the sense of their own independence and self-worth (Palm, 1977; Sennet and Cobb, 1977; Knights and Roberts, 1982; Knights and Willmott, 1985). For by assuming an indifference to all that happens at work other than the pay packet, workers can discount the indignity of subordination at the same time as elevating the meaning and significance of their private lives, where they have a limited measure of choice and independence. In Burawoy's factory, however, this choice and independence are built into the game of making-out. Hence workers are able to retain dignity and elevate their own identity and self-worth through a competent performance in successfully achieving targets and bonuses, especially in circumstances where the job task militates against it.

The problem is that Burawoy's essentialism prevents him from fully explaining the shop floor's preoccupation with success in the game. One part of this explanation must lie with the men's concern with their own masculine identity, but Burawoy is 'blind' to the gender issue, for he argues quite innocently that 'although sex may have been a significant influence on the formation of relations in production, the fact that there were only two women . . . makes it impossible to draw any conclusions' (1979: 140). On the contrary, as will be seen from our next study, the relative absence of women from the shop floor in skilled and semi-skilled engineering workplaces allows many conclusions to be drawn – but conclusions that demonstrate patriarchal more than capitalist domination (Rothschild, 1983).

Again, though, an opportunity is missed in failing to recognise how the game of making-out is readily identified with the ideology of masculine prowess and the macho sense of being in control of externalities in the material world.

Far from being compensations for the deprived conditions of shop-floor work (Burawoy, 1979: 199), these are precisely the kind of subjectivities or identities that lead men to seek out or be happily resigned to accepting manual working jobs in the first place (Willis, 1977). It is also this selfsame subjectivity which associates tough physical labour and hard, practical, down-to-earth living with the sense of what it is to be a man of independence and integrity (Knights and Collinson, 1985). In numerous ways this contributes to the reproduction of the conditions of both gender and class inequality, for it is a subjectivity that depends on negating its polar opposite in femininity and non-manual work as ephemeral, impractical or superfluous and parasitical. In this sense, industrial workers are fully aware that the foundations of material wealth lie with their own labour but, largely as a consequence of individualisation, they use this knowledge not so much to attack capitalism (Knights and Collinson, 1987) as for the purpose of aggressively defending their own class and gendered subjectivity or identity (Knights and Willmott, 1985).

In contrast to Burawoy's analysis, which perceives no labour process significance in the fact that women are comparatively absent from the shop floor of a small-parts machine shop, Cockburn (1983) is concerned to examine the complex interrelationships between gender and class relations in a study of technological change in the printing industry. The fact that women are absent from certain jobs may not be a basis for drawing immediate conclusions, but it is a problem to investigate rather than ignore. It is not unlikely that the jobs at Allied were male-dominated because of exclusionary practices, whether of an intentional or unreflected character. Cockburn found considerable evidence of the direct exclusion of women by the craft unions (*ibid.*: 153). Her main focus, however, was on the taken-for-granted assumption about compositor work as a male preserve, which were based either on essentialist arguments that women are not physically and mentally equipped to do it or pseudo-moral principles concerning the protection of women's domesticity and/or femininity (*ibid.*: 174–190). All these arguments have self-fulfilling-prophecy elements about them since not only does exclusion deprive women of the potential to develop appropriate strengths, skills and confidence to enter such work but the continuous absence

of one sex precludes arranging the labour process (for example, the technology, ergonomics and work design) with anyone other than men in mind.

Although, as Burawoy (1979: 84–5) points out, game-playing at Allied was not exclusively concerned with economically instrumental preoccupations with maximising bonus, a gender focus would have helped a fuller understanding of the situation. For it could be argued that in both wage (breadwinner power and status) and other (macho challenges) terms, the labour process is thoroughly infused with the reproduction of masculine identity, especially in workplaces like engineering and printing, where men have traditionally monopolised the jobs. Moreover, this monopolisation can itself be seen partially as a condition and consequence of sustaining polarised sexual identities. In the context of male sexuality women are idealised as pure, innocent and in need of protection from a ‘cruel’ world dominated by men and yet simultaneously defiled, besmirched and viewed as dangerous and seductive temptresses whose sole aim is to entice some man into their clutches (Cockburn, 1983: 185–6; Collinson and Knights, 1986).

While partly a product of this conception of sexuality, the separation of domestic and non-domestic labour and the segregation of occupations and jobs, all on the basis of gender, facilitate its continuity by precluding men from having to confront directly and daily the tensions and contradictions of subscribing to mutually inconsistent stereotypes of women. But there is another male conception of sexuality which is sustained by – and yet helps to reproduce – segregation in the divisions of labour. This is the view of sexuality which rationalises – indeed, celebrates – the difference between the sexes in terms of complementarity (Cockburn, 1983). Despite numerous inconsistencies, the stereotyped perceptions of women as – for example – patient, empathetic, artistic, dexterous but temperamental and emotional, and men as impetuous, instrumental, technical and rational, are continuously reproduced both in employment and in the home. They clearly reflect – and provide a convenient rationale for retaining – the segregation of men and women in domestic and non-domestic labour which is nevertheless compatible with a conception of gender complementarity that actually justifies the interdependence of heterosexual couple relationships.

But it is not just sexist conceptions of sexuality that fuel patriarchal segregation practices in the domestic and non-domestic labour pro-

cess. Equally, and relatedly, the politics of masculinity has considerable impact on the sexual divisions of labour. This is because, as already argued, a substantial part of the definition of what it is to be masculine derives from the workplace and, among the working class, the 'tough', physical and productive character of labour (Tolson, 1977; Willis, 1977; Cockburn, 1983; Knights and Collinson, 1987). In obscuring the contradictory character of the 'macho' stereotyping of women as either virginal or whorish, gender segregation at work may be convenient, but it is teleological and thus unacceptable to explain its existence in these terms. For although job segregation is an effect as well as a condition of the reproduction of these distorted subjectivities and stereotypes, it is not consciously produced for purposes of maintaining them. What is required is an account of the way in which the masculine identity is tied to the job and is secured partly by treating hard, physical and/or skilled labour at a distance from and elevated above pen-pushing, non-manual work that, whether or not conducted by women, is perceived as effeminate (Knights and Collinson, 1987).

Based as it is on empirical material, Cockburn's claim that sexual identity and sexuality are equally as important as class explanations of occupational and job segregation is a major contribution to understanding the complexities of the labour process. As with Burawoy, however, her analysis gives too little empirical attention to the practices of management and their compatibility or incompatibility with the reproduction of particular shop-floor subjectivities or identities. Theoretically, Cockburn also falls into a parallel trap to that of Burawoy in subscribing to a compensatory theory of behaviour. In contrast to Burawoy's view that the restricted choices of game-playing on the shop floor compensate for the degradation of work, Cockburn (1983: 135) concludes that masculine identity is some kind of compensation for a 'working man's relative powerlessness in the face of capital. Even craft can do no more than modify this powerlessness.' It is for this reason, she argues, that craft workers jealously guard their differentials against the unskilled and semi-skilled because it is the higher wage that has to compensate the loss of physical, macho content to the job in the claim for masculine stature. In general, though, the wage is deemed important in the sense that the working-class man often 'depends for his self-respect on the idea that, though he is small in relation to capital he is big in relation to his home and wife' (*ibid.*: 134).

What is problematic about such compensatory theories is the way they close off further analysis of the constitution of subjectivity and its effects. Clearly, the introduction of gender identity into an analysis of the labour process is crucial since masculinity, femininity and sexuality itself are inescapably a part – as also are racial and ethnic origins and perspectives – of social relations, whether inside or outside formal work institutions.¹² Moreover, it has to be recognised that an all-male or all-white workforce is less a reason for neglecting gender and race than for focusing directly upon them, since an organisation that does not reflect the population from which it draws its labour is likely to have incorporated certain sexist and racist taken-for-granted assumptions. But gender and racial subjectivities and stereotypes are less likely to be compensations for deprivations experienced because of the degradation of labour under capitalism than simply means, however inappropriate, of managing the tensions and contradictions which surround sex and race relations in most contemporary Western institutions. The form these identities take, however, is constituted through particular effects of power. Yet this power is not to be seen as exclusively negative and coercive, nor its effects viewed as a stimulant for subjects to seek out compensatory rewards.

What, then, would lead Cockburn who provides otherwise penetrating insights into the gendered labour process to resort to a compensatory theory? It would seem partly to be a legacy, which in some parts of the book is abandoned, of subscribing to a view of capitalism and patriarchy as two distinct systems rather than mutually interdependent forces affecting subjective identity. No doubt there are occasions where a gender and a class identity might appear to conflict. Take, for example, macho independence in working-class males, which often results in their competing on bonus rates (Burawoy, 1979), thus sustaining the interests of the capitalist class but accepting a redundancy pay-out rather than collectively resisting it (Knights and Collinson, 1987). But it has to be recognised that the macho gender identity is in this case a constitutive part of the working-class identity – one that has been cultivated or assumed as one 'effective' means of asserting self or managing the experience of self-consciousness. To suggest that it is a compensation is either to make a number of class-based presumptions about the deprived preferences of individual subjects or to resort to some essentialist assumptions concerning the inner self and the absence of opportunities for its expression. Conscious of the dangers of essentialism,

Cockburn, (1983: 175–9) tends to opt for the deprived-preferences argument, and indeed backs it up by quotes from the men's experience of a newspaper lock-out threatening their masculine identity because of being 'stuck at home' all the time (ibid.: 133–5). In effect, she argues, the loss of work is not just economically threatening but also deprives men of power and self-respect. Of course it does, because class and gender identity are not two separate systems; men have been historically constituted as 'breadwinners', so that any denial of this status is a threat to both their class and their gender identity. But macho behaviour is not a compensation for the lack of class power; as Willis (1977) made clear, it is simply a way of asserting a meaning and identity that are continuous and realistic in terms of the gender and class conditions of the lads' existence.

Paradoxically, Cockburn's data do not require a compensatory theory and for most of the time she presents them without such weighty baggage. However, an alternative theory of power as positive and productive rather than exclusively negative and destructive would have helped the analysis. It would then be possible to see more clearly how the negative reproduction of class and gender inequality is often an unintended consequence of men's claims for independence and autonomy – claims, moreover, which are simply subjectivities imposed upon individuals precisely by a history of productive power or 'that system of disciplinings, through which power works, but only in so far as it conceals itself and presents itself as the reality' (Foucault, 1979: 66). Indeed, the aggressive assertions of identity are much more a result of the more general effects of *productive* power in constituting human beings as independent, individually responsible subjects with 'natural' rights and obligations of democratic autonomy and participation than they are a function of compensatory mechanisms.

It is possible that some will be more aggressive in projecting their identity than others and, partly as a result, less successful as participants within institutions where the cultural norms are social and symbolic and therefore involve taking on the attitude of others to a greater extent than asserting one's own. Furthermore, the discrepancy between modern subjectivity and this failure to be accepted as a full participant may generate in working-class men an anxiety or tension which is relieved by self-assertive actions in situations where the cultural norms accommodate a more physical, aggressive or material mode of identity-management. But this is not so much compensation as a realistic selection of sites upon which to assert and

secure this specific macho identity. There are, of course, greater limitations on full participation in hierarchically constituted labour processes but even here, as Burawoy's study makes clear, independence and responsibility are constituted and reproduced through a self-organised shop floor that confirms the identity of workers simultaneously as masculine and as self-autonomous subjects.

To conclude this section, it may be seen that both theorists develop the analysis of the labour process in a dialectical fashion admitting, to a greater or lesser degree, some conception of the subject. Each study has contributed significantly to the literature by respectively pointing to the importance of the self-organising potential of workers in, and the gendered as well as class character of, the labour process. Both, however, suffer some limitation in their conceptualisations of subjectivity; at the same time, though, these ethnographies do contain within them much of the empirical material necessary to develop a more convincing understanding of the subject and the management of class and gendered identity within the labour process. What is required to complement this work is a deeper analysis of subjectivity as both an effect of the exercise of power and a response to existential troubles that accompany the conditions and consequences of its exercise. A necessary precondition of such an analysis is not only to challenge conceptions of management control, as Burawoy does, and class and gender, as does Cockburn, but also to break away from viewing power as either a property of persons, groups or classes or as essentially repressive and constraining. Power cannot be seen as exclusively a negative force; it is equally positive and productive and is an ineradicable aspect of – and perspective for analysing – social relations. From this perspective it is possible to escape essentialist assumptions of human nature, impositions of class deprivation and envy as well as dualistic analyses, whether between subjectivity and power (Burawoy) or class and patriarchy (Cockburn). In the remainder of this chapter there is an attempt to meet this challenge by drawing selectively, yet critically, on the work of Foucault in relation to his analysis of power and subjectivity.

FOUCAULT'S APPROACH TO SUBJECTIVITY AND POWER

Foucault's analysis must be seen as following a logic quite the opposite of the humanistic Marxism to which most of the preceding

authors may be said to subscribe. Indeed, it has been his professed aim to rid discourse of the 'transcendental subject' which he saw as a legacy from classical philosophy. Consequently, he challenges those humanists who continue to perceive subjectivity as that creative autonomy or personal space not yet captured by political economy. Rather, Foucault (1979a) views the subject as the constitutive product of a plurality of disciplinary mechanisms, techniques of surveillance and power-knowledge strategies. Power, for Foucault, is not likely to be discovered by the usual questions of 'what is it?' and 'where does it come from?' (1982: 217), for outside its exercise, power does not exist. He is, however, prepared to distinguish the domain of power relations or domination as exclusively pertaining to the actions or ensemble of actions that 'does not act directly or immediately on others. Instead it acts upon their actions' (ibid.: 220). Power, therefore, is not to be confused or conflated with the transformative capacity of labour (the moulding of nature), the communicative act (the production of meaning), the use of violence (threats to the body) or the practice of consent (legitimacy accorded to individuals). Although these may all figure as instruments, intentions or results of its exercise, Foucault (ibid.: 221) argues that a necessary precondition yet also support for the exertion of power is freedom of action – 'a field of possibilities' of alternative modes of behaviour, responses, or courses of action. Succinctly, Foucault (ibid.: 221–2) argues: 'at the heart of the power relationship, and constantly provoking it, are the recalcitrance of the will and the intransigence of freedom'.

In contrast to Marxists, who concentrate on the exploitation of labour through capital's appropriation of surplus value, and feminists, who are concerned with the domination of women through patriarchal legacies, Foucault draws attention to subjugation. Unfortunately, he does not specify the precise details of subjugation, relying simply on obtuse statements about the effects of modern technologies of power to force individuals back in on themselves so that they become 'tied to [their] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982: 212). However, without breaching the spirit of his argument, it may be suggested that subjugation occurs where the freedom of a subject is directed narrowly, and in a self-disciplined fashion, towards practices which may be seen or thought to secure the acknowledgement, recognition and confirmation of self by significant others. As will be seen later, it stems from the comparative social isolation that subjects suffer as a result of the individualising impact of power and knowledge in modern regimes.

For modern regimes are characterised by knowledge deriving from the human sciences which reflects and reinforces a growing 'technology' and 'economy' of power that circulates in a manner at once continuous, uninterrupted, adapted and 'individualised' throughout the entire social body (Foucault, 1979: 36–7).

This power is technological in so far as it is exercised in and through specific knowledges of bodies and minds (for example, medicine, psychoanalysis) and populations (for example, demography, social statistics); it is economical in that its effect is to infiltrate the mind or soul so as to constitute us as subjects who discipline ourselves. That is to say, the sense of what we are (that is, social identity) is confirmed and sustained through a positioning of ourselves in practices that reflect and reproduce prevailing power–knowledge relations. Foucault's unique contribution is to display the links between the constitution of subjects and their objectification, subjectivisation and ultimate subjugation through specific knowledges (for example, the biological, medical, demographic, psychological and social sciences) which are both a condition and consequence of technologies of power – technologies that are not only or largely negative or repressive but also positive and productive of life. Indeed, it is precisely because they are productive that subjects embrace the disciplinary technologies of modern power–knowledge regimes with enthusiasm and commitment as if they were *purely* their own invention.

Of course, as was seen in Burawoy's study of shop-floor games, the positive and productive nature of power actually involves those subjected to it in elaborating its effects and reproducing the regime through which it is exercised. For once labour participates and positions itself in practices that are a consequence of the exercise of power, that power need no longer be exercised with such vigour, if at all, since labour collaborates in its reproduction. It does so because, as was suggested earlier, this is an effective way through which labour subjects secure a sense of their own importance, competence, independence and sexuality – all identities that are constituted, yet made vulnerable, by the individualising effects of modern technologies of power (for example, the examination, career-hierarchical observation, human rights and the proliferation of sexual discourses).

POWER AND THE INDIVIDUALISATION OF SUBJECTS

Although Foucault does not directly concern himself with explaining how subjects readily consent to the various technologies of power, there is an implicit assumption that the positive and productive character of power weakens the resistance which might arise were its effects solely constraining, prohibitive or repressive. For in sustaining health and welfare, promoting self-help and individual responsibility and encouraging competition, strategies of power do generate a degree of subjective well-being in constituting subjects in this way. In this sense hierarchical observation, normalising judgements and the examination are strategies that invest power in individual subjects and therefore represent a power that contributes to its own dispersal. In short, they increase the capacity of individuals to transform their own circumstances and advance their own material well-being. They also provide 'support' and 'relay' for the distribution of subjects throughout a career system in an organisation or a stratified structure of material and symbolic inequality in society as a whole. At the same time, however, these strategies of power render individuals uncertain and insecure because, under systems of surveillance, subjects can never be sure of meeting the standards of normalisation nor guarantee their successful performance in examinations. It also places individuals in competition with one another for the scarce rewards of recognition which may be granted by achieving the very best standards of behaviour and performance deemed to be required by those exercising power. The combined effect is to isolate individuals from one another.

It is implied, in Foucault's conception of the individualising effect of power and its tendency to push individuals back in on themselves, that the resulting self-consciousness is itself constraining in tying us to our own identities. But in relation to why or how this should be so, Foucault remains silent. His silence is more or less self-imposed, resulting from an explicit rejection – yet an implicit and concealed use – of the subjectivist philosophies of existentialism and phenomenology in arriving at this insight. For when as individuals we are separated off from one another and rendered more directly and intensely responsible as persons for our own actions, the sense of what we are (that is, identity) can no longer be taken for granted. In the same way, as competition for material benefits and rewards increases, so identity, self-worth or confirmation of our own significance also becomes more problematic and precarious.

Now even in collectivised conditions where roles and statuses are largely ascribed, identity is never completely unproblematic, since others' judgements of one's conformity can be neither predicted nor controlled. In individualised societies, others' evaluations of self are inevitably less certain. Moreover, they concern not just the degree of conformity to predefined roles but also the totality of behaviour which could constitute a role or identity at the very outset. It would seem, therefore, that individuals are more insecure about their identity in modern society and this, self-defeatingly, will tend to render them more vulnerable to the individualising effects of specific power mechanisms. For the anticipated achievement of material and symbolic success promises to eradicate the uncertainty of others' judgements and hence provides the illusion of a future secure identity. That such certainty continuously escapes individuals only serves to encourage them to struggle more vigorously for scarce recognition, thus further reinforcing the individualising effects of power upon one another.

Perhaps a note of caution is required here¹³ in order to distance myself from any essentialist trappings that could be read into the analysis. I am not suggesting that anxiety or insecurity is an essential quality of the human condition or can be used as a universal explanation of behaviour. These qualities are simply one set of an almost infinite variety of human characteristics of which expression or manifestation is contingent upon definite historical and social conditions. Likewise, the object of insecurity is equally contingent and is directed at identity or the sense of self only in the present highly individualised era where the erosion of collective communities has placed in question the very meaning and significance of individual human existence. In short, our individualised way of life promotes both an expansion and an intensification of individual insecurity which is then managed, through further individualising efforts, so as to display and demonstrate a personal significance by means of elevating one's own identity.

Unfortunately, the rituals of modern identity-management are less coherent and considerably more dislocated than in previous stages of our history. For in earlier civilisations, *rites de passage* were almost entirely predictable and not quite the responsibility of the individual, as in the modern era. As Fromm (1956) has argued, this personal responsibility for an identity that relies ultimately on the unpredictable, uncontrollable and often ephemeral judgements and evaluations of others is both positive and negative in its implications:

positive in freeing us from totalitarian and authoritarian restrictions on human creativity and social purpose; yet negative in simply leading us to subordinate our energies to that which gives us the illusion of security. That it is an illusion is continually made manifest in the precarious, temporary and transitory character of others' (and, indeed, our own) judgements and evaluations of us. One suspects that this is partly what leads Foucault (1982: 16) to argue for the promotion of 'new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on us for several centuries'. In speaking about resistance, however, Foucault displaces his analytical self-discipline with a kind of moral outrage.

SUBJECTIVITY AND RESISTANCE

It has been noted by some commentators (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982; Smart, 1985) how Foucault inadvertently slips out of analysis into a prescriptive discourse in which he assumes the moral authority to recommend a particular course of resistance. One of the most explicit examples is his criticism of the deployment of sexuality and the associated domination of sex-desire where the counterattack is to be 'bodies and pleasures' (Foucault, 1979a: 154). Another is his statement (Foucault, 1982: 216) that 'the target nowadays is not to discover what we are, but to refuse what we are'. Smart (1985: 134) argues that Foucault's prescriptivism is both rare and contradictory, not least because it carries with it 'the implication of an historical subject of resistance'. This is contradictory in the sense that Foucault has been at great pains throughout his work to purge discourse of the pre-given, universal subject as the foundation of truth and meaning and as the starting point of analysis.

As was seen earlier, however, and somewhat contradictory to his anti-humanism, Foucault subscribes to a conception of freedom as a universal condition of human existence but, as with resistance, it remains untheorised. This is not very satisfactory for, as Cousins and Hussain (1984: 255) point out, although Foucault achieved 'spectacular results in the analysis of social practices without a "theory of the subject" . . . the problem does not disappear simply because it is outflanked'. They have also questioned, for example, whether the 'analysis of successes and failures of techniques of individuation can proceed by bracketing off forever the nature of the material on which

those techniques depend . . . [for] . . . if it does then it ends up as a form of behaviourism' (ibid.). As they go on to say, behaviourism 'does not resolve the problem of the subject', for it assumes that human beings are a *tabula rasa* ready to receive any impression and that they are homogeneous (ibid.: 256). Foucault's failure, in their words, to face up to the problem of the subject and specify the nature of the human material upon which techniques of power and knowledge operate makes it difficult to assess whether or not behaviourism is his ontological 'bottom line'.¹⁴ Has it to be assumed, then, that there is no alternative to conceptualising the subject in terms either of 'freedom' as an empty or residual category or as the reward-seeking object of stimulus-response conditioning that passes for behaviourism? Cousins and Hussain (1984: 256) suggest that 'the human material on which techniques work is already differentiated' and that 'psychical relations is a legitimate object of enquiry into such differentiation'. But this hardly represents a major advance, especially since they give no indication of how these psychical relations could be studied independently of the social constitution of subjectivity.

In terms of understanding the vulnerability of subjects to the subjectifications of 'productive competence', 'making-out' or 'macho identity' that reside in shop-floor games and sex-discriminatory practices, an examination of the negative as well as the positive aspects of freedom would be more illuminating. Positively, freedom may be seen to refer to the self-conscious character of human beings and therefore the intentionality of behaviour, regardless of the degree to which individuals are subjected to power. There is, however, an 'openness' to this self-consciousness which can be anxiety-provoking in that it imposes an intentionality but not its content. Societies, of course, vary in the extent to which this content is filled in, but what characterises modern Western technologies of power is that they elevate the independent freedom and intentionality of subjects while often narrowing the forms and limiting the means by which these can be sustained. It is this contradiction in capitalist society that is seen by humanistic Marxists as alienation or a denial of the possibilities for human beings to express their essential nature.

The problem with such an essentialist view of the subject is that it fills in the content of self-consciousness having the effect of *reducing* freedom to an expression of inner being rather than simply an 'openness' to possibilities or the mere condition of what it is to be

human. From this reductionist position, humanists subscribing to a vast range of political perspectives are able to agree that the absence of opportunities to express this essence through labour, for example, is alienating because it denies individuals the freedom of their essential nature as human beings. Foucault (1982: 221), on the other hand, perceives *freedom* and *power* as defining characteristics of one another, for 'where the determining factors saturate the whole there is no relationship of power'. It is precisely because human actions are free that power is exercised as a means of persuading others to use their freedom in a particular way. In short, power does not deny freedom; it simply directs it along distinct channels.

It is a juridical conception of power more appropriate to a previous classical era when sovereign power was dominant that, Foucault (1980) argues, leads theorists to identify the essence of humanity as individual self-expression. Here freedom is posited as the converse of power since, in the hands of God or the sovereign, power is all-embracing in its negative, repressive and constraining domination of individuals. In modern regimes, however, human self-expression is simply one prevalent 'truth' effect of *productive* power in constituting the subject in terms of the 'rights' of the individual. Clearly, human beings do experience dissonance, or what is often described as alienation, when their 'rights' to choose and act responsibly seem to be violated, but it is not some inner essence of which they are deprived. It is no more than an inconsistency in the power of specific strategies to constitute or sustain the subject in a 'positive' mode. What Marx and other similarly inclined humanists have done is to produce a discourse that merely translates the power-induced subjectivity of the Enlightenment into an expressive conception of human nature upon which to build an edifice of intellectual constructions (for example, class structure, the state) that are deemed to account for its demise.

However, where Marx neglects the positive aspects of power, Foucault glosses the negative impact of freedom that renders subjects invariably ambivalent and/or confused as to what to do or how to behave. Self-consciousness reminds us constantly that there are alternative ways of behaving to those power-induced practices that capture us in our everyday grasping for the 'straws' of our own independent significance or importance. But the fear of losing any credits of social significance that have been built up in practices with which we are familiar frequently hold us back from pursuing these alternatives. In effect, the sense of ourselves becomes so tied to the

continuous participation in – and reproduction of – a set of practices like the game of ‘making-out’ or the elevating of one sex over another and the resulting discrimination that any potential disruption is defined not just as a change in behaviour but as a threat to our very identity. Caught in the double-bind of the desire for individual independence and the fear of social isolation – both of which are an effect of, or derive from, the strategies of liberal power regimes that constitute the modern subject – individuals seek private success and institutional power as an illusory solution to the problem of freedom.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Although space has not allowed a full evaluation of the implications of this approach, the intimation is that it would facilitate an escape from some of the dangers of determinism, objectivism and dualism which have been identified as distinct problems in the labour process literature. In addition, it can correct for the failure of labour process theory to incorporate an adequate account of the subject within the social relations of production. By recognising the intimate links between power and freedom, this Foucaultian perspective can avoid the worst excesses of determinism in an analysis of the labour process. At the same time, it does not (need to) fall back upon an essentialist conception of human nature which this determinate power, paradoxically, is seen to transgress. In this respect, neither voluntarism nor determinism dominate social analysis. Furthermore, the identification of freedom as a universal condition of human existence undermines those critics who have charged Foucault with abject pessimism. For despite the strength of disciplinary mechanisms and the dispersal of power to every nook and cranny in society, this freedom provides for an emancipatory potential and virtually guarantees a measure of resistance to subjugation. His view is that human action is fundamentally free in as much as there is always a field of possibilities or courses of action alternative to those undertaken by subjects subjected to power.

Although they cannot be studied independently of their relationship to political or racial domination or economic exploitation, modern forms of power, which are exercised through subjecting individuals to their own identity or subjectivity, are not mechanisms directly derived from the forces of production, class struggle or

ideological structures (Foucault, 1982: 213). Moreover, since power is not the property of persons, a dominant class, sovereign or the state but is dispersed throughout the social relations of a population in a diverse set of mechanisms and a multiplicity of directions, the self-organised consent of labour, described by Burawoy, can more easily be understood as the outcome of individuals securing themselves (that is, their identities) as independent, masculine, skilled or competent workers through mechanisms of self-constituted games, capital-constituted production systems and jointly constituted bonus schemes.

Similarly, the history of gender inequality and segregation at work cannot be understood simply in terms of the class struggle and resistance to the erosion of wages which might result from the entry of women into the labour market for, like many manual workers, the printer's identity as working-class, in Cockburn's (1983: 213) account, is often subordinated to preoccupations with asserting or sustaining his self-image of masculinity. Foucault's perspective does not deny the importance of economic exploitation and its relationship to power relations that constitute us as gendered subjects with consequent implications for relations between the sexes; he simply would not accept that the latter are derived from the former. Nor would he be likely to accept an equally common tendency among feminists to perceive gender inequality as a derived legacy of relations of sexual domination under feudalism. Cockburn herself subscribes to neither of these modes of analysis but to a combination of both in what has become known as 'dual-systems' theory (*ibid.*: 8) where class and patriarchy are seen to have independent yet mutually reinforcing effects on gender relations. An analysis of subjectivity takes the understanding that much further because it shows how the self-constitution of identity-sustaining practices has the effect, though not necessarily the intention, of reproducing class and gender inequality.

To be sure, Foucault's analysis is not a substitute for theories of domination and exploitation; it simply presents a conception of power and subjectivity that facilitates an understanding of how subjects voluntarily engage in practices which reproduce patriarchal and capitalist institutions. Take, for example the 'New Right' political philosophy of the post-1960s. Traditional labour process theories fail to explain the erosion of labour resistance except in the negative terms of the weakening of the labour market and the strengthening of legal constraints on trade unions. But before their introduction, these

state-led interventions to curb the practices of organised labour were readily accepted even by many who were to suffer as a result of them. Moreover, the regime that undermined the potential of the working class to resist remains increasingly popular, again even among those (for example, the redundant) who have sacrificed long-term activity for short-term identity gains (Knights and Collinson, 1987). The 'New Right' clearly appeals to – and is productive of – the materials and symbols that confirm the subjective identities of a majority of the population, such that it can claim their willing submission to its power and truth effects.

It has been suggested that in emphasising both the productive and individualising effects of power on subjectivity, Foucault's approach is more illuminating than those perspectives at present drawn upon by labour process theory. However, in refusing to make explicit his reliance on conceptualisations of the subject drawn from phenomenology, existentialism and symbolic interactionism, Foucault fails to explicate a theory of the subject that seems vital to his discourse. An example of this can be found in his brief discussion of how subjects become 'tied to [their] own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge' (Foucault, 1982: 212) as power mechanisms (for example, the examination, occupational recruitment, career systems, and so on) have the effect of separating individuals off from one another and forcing them back upon themselves. Here there is an implied reliance both upon phenomenological reflections on the social construction of self and existential perceptions of the fear or anxiety of social isolation. Foucault's contribution is to show how individuals come to recognise themselves as subjects, with definite identities, through the social practices in which they (we) engage, which are both the medium and the outcome of the exercise of power invested with specific strategies, knowledges and techniques. But his anathema to humanistic perspectives that elevate the subject as the source or origin of meaning results in his neglecting explicitly to draw upon the insight of the subjectivists philosophies.

I have argued that these philosophies can be utilised without falling into the trap of assuming a universal, ahistorical anxious subject as at the root of the human condition, for it is the particular historical conditions wherein subjects become individualised – and therefore simultaneously more dependent on others, yet less certain of the continuity of the relations in which their dependence resides – that generate their anxiety and insecurity. This is particularly acute in relation to the specific identity to which the individual has become

tyed or subjugated, for though an imposition of various strategies of power constitute the subject in this way, there is little escape from a personal responsibility for its management.

In terms of advancing a political praxis, labour process theory will need to go beyond the analysis of management control, labour exploitation, deskilling and the intensification of production. It will also be necessary to extend the analysis of contradictions to incorporate those that revolve around the preoccupation with subjective security and the attempts to render meaning unproblematic. As has been suggested throughout this chapter, the behaviour of subjects is not simply or exclusively determined by the forces of capitalist production and exploitation. Much action is voluntarily undertaken either as the result of routinised practices that have stabilising effects on meaning or as specific anticipated means of acquiring material and symbolic resources that facilitate or are a product of sustaining subjective security. It also has to be recognised that Foucault's (1982: 216) demand that subjects begin 'to refuse what they have become' remains something of an empty rhetoric unless there is some penetration of the way in which the attachment to 'fixed' sets of meanings is related to the pursuit of subjective security. Indeed, it would require that the target of resistance become the very preoccupation with stable meaning and not just the specific form of subjectivity or identity through which it seeks an escape or protection. In the absence of reflecting upon the possibility of overcoming our vulnerability to securing order and stability in the structure of meaning that is perceived to protect subjective identity, the chances of collective solidarity providing labour with the power to transform the social organisation of production in conformity with its actual socialised character seem remote.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Stewart Clegg, Peter Miller, Andrew Sturdy, Tony Tinker and Hugh Willmott for helpful criticisms of an earlier draft of this chapter.
2. Quite clearly the scale and virulence of the critique of Braverman would appear crippling, but critical attention in the social sciences is not necessarily indicative of a flawed theoretical enterprise. Dismissal is much more easily achieved through selective neglect.
3. I have specifically excluded from this analysis those theorists generally known for their work on the subject (e.g. Freud, Fromm, Marcuse,

- Lacan) not only for reasons of space but also because of the greater overall relevance of Foucault's work to labour process theory.
4. It is very difficult to imagine how any analysis of social life could be conducted in the absence of assumptions about human nature, however inexplicit. For this reason, if no other, the refusal to theorise subjectivity is contradictory since it leaves analysis partially dependent on an unexplicated common sense.
 5. In so far as it is perceived as the foundation of all knowledge and the principle of all signification, the concept of a sovereign subject underlying Braverman's philosophical anthropology has to be dismantled (Racevskis, 1983: 26) in order to begin an analysis of the discursive and non-discursive practices that constitute the subject (Foucault, 1980: 117).
 6. As my colleague Hugh Willmott has commented, this version of an essentialist or humanistic Marxism could be seen more as the product of highly selective (psychologistic) readings of Marx (e.g. Fromm) than as attributable to the original thesis. An alternative to this perspective is to perceive a continuity between Marx's earlier and later writings wherein the speculative theory of alienation represents the foundation of his more scientific analysis of commodity fetishism and the domination of exchange relations in capitalism (McLellan, 1971; Meszaros, 1972). But others (e.g. Althusser, 1970) have argued that Marx abandoned his speculative philosophy on human nature, and with it the subjectivist concept of alienation, once he began to develop a scientific theory of political economy.
 7. This disbelief in the possibility of an inversion of the material (economic production) and social (property ownership) relations continuing could be seen as grounded in his historical materialism, where capitalism is simply a stage of development to be followed by socialism once private property begins to act as a constraint on productive growth. But this 'scientific' analysis is clearly reinforced by his romantic conception of labour for its subordination to the abstract relations of capital and exchange is seen to deprive human beings of their fundamental powers of self-expression.
 8. This is because within the terms of that dualistic debate the absence of external constraints on an individual's actions can be achieved only at the cost of constraining others, since they always represent a potential threat to one's own freedom. Such zero-sum conceptions of freedom and power have lost favour recently but the individualism from which they derive retains a common-sense supremacy.
 9. Instead, Wardell tends to reduce labour subjectivity to discretion and autonomy; this simply reproduces the control-resistance dualism at a slightly more abstract level reminiscent of the freedom-determinism dichotomy of analytical philosophy. Within such a perspective autonomy, creativity and subjectivity are simply treated as definitional identities pitted against that which is determining, destructive and objectivist. It fails to recognise how freedom is like the oxygen that power breathes, for both are necessarily exercised whenever human action is undertaken. That is why Foucault (1980) argues that power is always exercised as an action upon the *actions* of others.

10. Neimark and Tinker (1986: 110–11) are critical of the very separation of subjective and objective dimensions on the grounds that, according to a philosophy of internal relations, their internal interrelationship renders a 'firm distinction, and its corresponding remedies, without meaning'. Whilst in sympathy with a philosophy of internal relations (Ollman, 1971), there is a danger of foreclosing on analysis by refusing to make distinctions. Indeed, the logical conclusion to such a philosophy is the collapse of all analytical disciplines, since each misrepresents the world, where everything relates to and mutually defines everything else. There is simply no valid point of entry or exit for the theorist.
11. To be fair, Burawoy (1985: 39) seems to have recognised this weakness in his earlier (1979) thesis. Within the literature generally, research into the managerial labour process is beginning to be given the attention it deserves (Knights and Willmott, 1986; Willmott, 1987; McGoldrick, 1988).
12. Only through the critiques of feminists did labour process theory begin to transcend its gender myopia; it has not yet done so in respect of race. Part of the reason for this may be that there is almost an industry in race – as in gender – relations, which requires a considerable investment to penetrate for purposes of incorporating into labour process theory.
13. Both Stewart Clegg and Tony Tinker raised questions on an earlier draft of this paper concerning the dangers of 'smuggling in' existentialist essentialisms or universals which are no more acceptable than the humanism I have rejected in labour process theory.
14. There is evidence for and against: his conception of the 'free subject', for example, is completely incompatible with behaviourism in that this would involve bringing a concept of mind or consciousness into analysis. This is unacceptable, because Skinner's science of behaviour admits only phenomena that are strictly observable to the senses. Furthermore, Foucault would himself reject behaviourism's preoccupation with scientificity, since for him the most important questions concern the conditions under which disciplines emerge, are deployed and have particular truth effects. On the other hand, however, the hedonism which underlines behaviourism – that subjects are assumed to respond positively to pleasant, and negatively to painful, stimuli – would meet with considerable approval, for Foucault would see a potential here of 'sweeping away' the normalised and individualised effects of power and discipline.

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11 Subjectivity and the Dialectics of Praxis: Opening up the Core of Labour Process Analysis¹

Hugh Willmott

INTRODUCTION

Prompted by the appearance of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974), the labour process debate has been characterised by a series of critiques of its conceptual and historical adequacy, and by a stream of empirical studies which have varied considerably in their awareness and illumination of its central problematics. Although often exaggerated, deficiencies in Braverman's analysis are now widely accepted. Empirical weaknesses, such as his excessive emphasis upon Taylorism and deskilling, have been addressed (e.g. Edwards, 1979). At the same time, efforts have been made to develop more adequate conceptual tools for analysing central themes, such as the dynamics of management control (e.g. Storey, 1985; Friedman, in this volume).

Yet despite the penetrating critiques, the wealth of empirical studies, and the important efforts to elaborate or revise key elements of Braverman's thesis, attempts to reconstruct the theoretical foundations of labour process analysis have been conspicuously absent. Of course, there are significant exceptions to this general rule, three of which (Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Storey, 1983) will be examined later in this chapter. None the less, much labour process analysis continues to be preoccupied with a rehearsal of the substantive inadequacies of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, with making *ad hoc* revisions to its conceptual apparatus, or with applying some variant of labour process concepts to interpret empirical data

(Thompson, in this volume). In short, a significant feature of the labour process debate has been a reluctance to build upon critique to undertake a systematic reconstruction of labour process theory.

What, then, is the fundamental theoretical weakness in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, and what needs to be done about it? Numerous commentators have identified or alluded to the basic problem: Braverman assumes that the 'objective' and 'subjective' aspects of the labour process can be separated and analysed independently of each other (Jacoby, 1976). Critical of this assumption, his critics have argued that 'an understanding of capitalist control cannot . . . be reached without due attention to the "subjective" components of work' (Burawoy, 1985: 24). The basic deficiency of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Burawoy argues, is that it attends exclusively to the 'objective' dimension of the capital-labour relation. Associating Braverman's exclusion of the 'subjective' aspects from his analysis with many, if not all, of the conceptual and empirical deficiencies of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, Burawoy (ibid.: 25) observes:

Just as reliance on the 'objective' aspects of the labour process prevents Braverman from understanding the day-to-day impact of particular forms of 'control' The same focus also precludes an explanation of the historical tendencies and variations in the labour process . . . he makes all sorts of assumptions about the interests of capitalists and managers, about their consciousness, and about their capacity to impose their interests on subordinate classes. (Ibid.: 25)

A central concern of this chapter is to develop a more adequate, materialist theory of subjectivity, a priority also identified (in this volume) by Thompson, who observes that 'the construction of a full theory of the *missing subject* is probably the greatest task facing labour process theory'. It will be argued that the absence of such a theory, which is traced to Marx's seminal writings (Aronowitz, 1978), is found to be amplified by Braverman and to remain uncorrected by subsequent efforts to remedy the deficiencies of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. A more adequate appreciation of subjectivity must be founded upon the materialist premiss that the labour process 'is, first of all, a process between man and nature, a process by which man, through his own actions, mediates, regulates and controls the metabolism between himself and nature' (Marx, 1976: 283). Such a theory must be attentive to the significance of the open nature of the

relationship between 'man and nature' as well as the relationship between other human beings. Specifically, it must take account of the historical formation and problematical reproduction of self-consciousness in the reflexive, 'metabolic' process of accomplishing our 'species-being'.

Of greatest import for labour process analysis, the theoretical posture adopted by the mature Marx overlooks the political significance of the individualising of self-consciousness in the process of capital development. In focusing upon the contradictions within the capitalist system, the analysis of the labour process in *Capital* attends to individuals 'only in so far as they are the personification of economic categories' (ibid.: 92). Individuals are theorised simply as 'the bearers of class relations and interests' (ibid.) that are determined by the laws of the system. This analytical strategy has the decisive benefit of abandoning bourgeois, idealistic conceptions of the independent individual who understands himself to be raised above the relations 'whose creature he remains, socially speaking' (ibid.), but it also incurs the cost of being incapable of exploring the dialectics of the relationship between the individual's contradictory relation to nature and the contradictory structure of the capitalist system. This is important, or so it will be argued, because by making all that is apparently solid about identity melt into air (cf. Marx and Engels 1970: 38; Berman, 1982), the process of individualisation promotes and feeds upon the ontological insecurity associated with the separation of human beings and nature. From this perspective, the dialectics of praxis must go beyond a disembodied exploration of how the labour process is 'an inseparable combination of its economic, political and ideological aspects' (Burawoy, 1985: 25) to appreciate how their reproduction and transformation are mediated by the existential problem of identity as well as by the historical problem of power (Knights and Willmott, 1985).

This chapter begins by examining the meaning and appeal of dialectics as a remedy for the deficiencies of Braverman's *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (1974). Taking Storey's *Managerial Prerogative and the Question of Control* (1983) as an exemplar of this approach, it is argued that his proposed framework marginalises the practical, critical thrust of labour process analysis (cf. Braverman, 1974: xii; Thompson, in this volume). Deficiencies common to the analysis of both Braverman and his critics invite a return to Marx's seminal writings on the alienation/commodification of labour. Accordingly, the next section presents an interpretation and critique of the

Marxian foundations of labour process analysis. First, the centrality of human sensuousness, self-mediation and praxis in Marx's materialist critique of Hegelian dialectics is recalled. Marx's early analysis of labour as dehumanised subjectivity is then compared with his mature analysis, where he adopts the analytical strategy of treating individuals as personifications of economic categories. A critique of Marx's materialist dialectics is then advanced: it is argued that his theory of self-mediation marginalises and historicises the significance of both the positive and negative potential of the fears and insecurities which attend the human experience of separation from nature. As a consequence, his analysis of the organisation and control of the labour process omits an appreciation of how the dynamics of radical change are impeded as well as impelled by anxieties about identity and attachments to routines which are fuelled by the individualising effects of capitalist relations of production.

Having reconstructed Marx's understanding of subjectivity, the chapter briefly reviews the efforts of a number of post-Bravermanian analysts (Friedman, 1977; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980; Burawoy, 1979, 1985; Pollert, 1981) to correct the absence of a concern with the subjective dimension of social reproduction within *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Lacking a theory capable of penetrating the complex constitution and reproduction of subjectivity, these studies are shown to be inattentive to the ways in which the contradictory, self-mediating relation to nature is also centrally implicated in its reproduction. It is necessary, this chapter proposes, to appreciate the intertwining and interdependence of the 'historical' and 'existential' dimensions of the dialectics of praxis.² Whilst shaped by the historical relations of social reproduction, praxis is also accomplished through a contradictory relation to nature. A key task for labour process analysis, it is suggested, is to develop a theory capable of grasping and exposing how the historical and existential dimensions of praxis interpenetrate to present us with threats, as well as opportunities for transforming the conditions of our collective self-formation.

THE APPEAL OF DIALECTICS

The purpose of this section is to assess the contribution of the 'dialectical alternative' in advancing labour process analysis. Seeking to correct the theoretical deficiencies of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, many commentators have appealed for the development of a

more 'dialectical' perspective in which the interdependence of the 'subjective' and 'objective' aspects of the labour process is more adequately theorised (Edwards; Wardell; Knights; all in this volume). Indeed, 'dialectics' has become something of a shibboleth amongst critics of *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Invoked to reprimand Braverman for his neglect of the subjective aspects of the organisation of capitalist labour processes, it is also used to attack those who have sought to remedy this neglect. Mackenzie (1977: 249), for example, describes Braverman's work as 'one sided . . . devoid of dialectical under/or over tones', while those (such as Burawoy) who seek to correct the deficiencies of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* have themselves been criticised for being 'fundamentally undialectical' (Clawson and Fantasia, 1983: 680, 671; cf. Peck, 1982; Gartman, 1982, 1983). Others, such as Thompson (in this volume), are sceptical of the claims of those espousing 'dialectics', arguing that their work frequently 'does not take us far beyond the recognition of mutual influences'. Certainly, the task of developing a dialectical alternative to Bravermanian labour process theory is made no easier by the absence of any clear or universally accepted understanding of its meaning (Neimark and Tinker, 1986). Before proceeding further, therefore, it may be helpful to indicate what is understood by the term 'dialectics' in this chapter.

The distinguishing feature of dialectical analysis resides in its recognition that every phenomenon derives its ontology from its relation to other phenomena. From this perspective, phenomena which appear to be independent – even opposed – are also united, in contradictory forms of unity (Ollman, 1971; Sayer, 1983). The critical and practical significance of dialectics is that it challenges the view that the social world comprises an assemblage of clearly bounded, objective entities which exist independently of each other and whose interrelations can be grasped in these dualistic terms (Knights and Willmott, 1983; Willmott, 1986; Knights, in this volume). In raising as problematic what appear to be separate and solid elements of social reality, Marxian dialectics reveals how activities and ideas are expressive of a historically emergent praxis. Stressing the *practical* significance of dialectical analysis, Marx writes:

From the moment that the bourgeois mode of production and the conditions of production and distribution which correspond to it are recognised as *historical*, the delusion of regarding these as natural laws of production vanishes and the prospect opens up for a

new society, [a new] economic social formation to which capitalism is only the transition. (Marx, 1971: 429, quoted in Sayer, 1987: 136)

The practical, critical intent of Marx's materialist analysis, which directly informs his study of 'the hidden abode of production' (Marx, 1976: 279), is to expose the socially unnecessary fetishising of the dialectics of labour, and to show how this may be overcome. Later in this chapter, I try to show how this intent is deflected by a failure to appreciate how the contradictory relation to nature and the contradictory development of the capitalist mode of production *interpenetrate* to constitute a form of individualised subjectivity which is undetectable using the analytical strategy favoured by Marx in his mature study of the capitalist labour process. For the moment, however, I concentrate on the most systematic formulation of the dialectical alternative to Bravermanian labour process theory: the dialectical approach developed by Storey (1983) which, it is claimed, embraces the fruits of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* while taking account of its key shortcomings.³ Comprising the conceptual elements of 'contradiction', 'totality' and 'social construction', this approach is said to provide a more adequate understanding of 'the dynamic nature of the control of production', 'the wider social and economic context within which control strategies are shaped' and 'the resistance of labour and the reciprocal interrelationship between control and resistance' (ibid.: 6). In general, the value and distinctiveness of such an approach, Storey contends, is that it

directs attention to *social interaction* with a prefigurative world constructed by forebears. While action is thereby influenced and constricted it is not determined. The maintenance of an inter-subjective reality requires perpetual reconstruction. This occurs, however, within an interconnected whole – a "totality". This contains inherent contradictions such that actions taken to alleviate a perceived problem trigger complex related forces which may create new problems (ibid.: 7).

Each of the three elements of Storey's dialectical framework will now be examined in relation to Braverman's alleged failure to incorporate them within *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. I shall suggest that, in effect, Storey's proposal makes little advance upon Braverman's position and, in a number of key respects, actually promotes a theoretical regression of the debate.

(i) Contradiction

Drawing upon post-Bravermanian contributions to the labour process literature, Storey argues that the contradictory nature of the capitalist mode of production is inadequately theorised in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Without denying the force of this criticism in relation to Braverman's concept of the capitalist totality (see below), it is much less applicable to other elements of his thesis. For example, Storey attempts to apply this critique to the deskilling thesis by arguing that there are 'circumstances where relative surplus value is enhanced with a skilled labour force: the desiderata of control and surplus value thus contradict' (ibid.: 8). In pursuing this argument, however, Storey is insensitive to the subtlety of Braverman's position. Certainly Braverman takes for granted the interest of capital in retaining control over the means of production and identifies the deskilling of labour as a strategy for achieving this objective. In so doing, the thesis of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* tends to overlook the extent to which this 'objective' may be an unintended (but none the less broadly welcomed) effect of other strategic decisions. But at the same time Braverman emphasises that there is 'no unitary answer' to the question of how the labour process is transformed by the scientific-technical revolution.⁴ Why not? Because it 'involves all its aspects: labour power, the materials of labour and the products of labour' (Braverman, 1974: 169). The precise level and combination of skill deployed in the labour process, Braverman argues, depends upon the capacity of labour-power to resist and adapt in the face of capital's demand. It is also conditional upon the use of new raw materials and technologies which require the acquisition of new skills as well as downgrading or abolition of old ones (cf. Armstrong, n.d.; Wardell, in this volume). In principle, capital may be said to have an objective interest in deskilling labour in so far as this enhances its control, but in practice this interest is qualified, or displaced, by other considerations relating to the materials and products of labour as well as to its resistance. Perhaps the most crucial point, as Cohen (1987: 36) has observed, is that the attention given to control (and deskilling) is underpinned by a concern to reveal 'the specifically capitalist logic which constructs these tendencies'.

(ii) Totality

Storey criticises Braverman for failing to situate developments in the organisation and control of labour processes within the changing

totality of the global capitalist mode of production. This claim is difficult to reconcile with Braverman's discussions of the impacts of the 'scientific-technical revolution' (e.g. 1974: 170–3), the development of the 'universal market' (ibid.: 271 ff.), the regulatory interventions of the state (ibid.: 284 ff.), the internationalisation of capital (ibid.: 258 ff.) and structural changes in internal and external labour markets (ibid.: 384 ff.). While Braverman's discussions of these dimensions tend to be both brief and uneven, they do provide a valuable basis for further work in each area – work which labour process analysts have been slow to undertake (Strinati, in this volume). His attention to these areas also gives the lie to claims that Bravermanian labour process analysis is, or is obliged to be, narrowly focused upon the point of production (cf. Kelly, 1985). Having said this, it must be conceded that Braverman's comparative neglect of the political and ideological conditions of capital's position of continuing economic dominance leads him to favour a theory of the totality which assumes that the logic of capitalism itself ensures a structural organisation that is functional for the process of valorisation (Burawoy, 1985).

(iii) Social construction

Finally, Storey questions Braverman's assumption that the objective dimension of class can be sensibly examined independently of its subjective (re)production. Despite grasping the importance of the 'subjective' in social reproduction, Storey makes no attempt to develop a theory capable of providing a more adequate account of the 'subjective' and 'objective' aspects of the labour process. Instead, he draws upon Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionism in which these aspects are first separated and then mechanically combined as different moments in the process of social reproduction (Willmott, forthcoming). At the same time, Storey disregards the most valuable element in Berger and Luckmann's work, where attention is drawn to the significance of 'world-openness' and the insecurities (as well as the capacities) which are stimulated by the experience of subject-object separation. As a consequence, following Marx and Braverman, he attributes the existence of a reified conceptualisation of the social world exclusively to the presence of prevailing forms of domination. 'Social construction' is seen to have solely 'humanistic and liberation potential' (1983: 41). That its presence might be *ambivalent*, posing a threat as well as an opportunity, is not contemplated. So, instead of striving to develop a more

adequate theory of the capitalist labour process in which the reproduction of forms of control is mediated by 'open' subjectivities that are constituted within contradictory relations of production, Storey follows Braverman in theorising contradiction and/or resistance in terms of an *essential* subjectivity that is alienated by the degrading demands of capitalism (Knights, in this volume).⁵

It may be concluded that Storey's formulation of dialectical analysis makes comparatively little advance upon *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. His concept of contradiction fails to appreciate the subtlety of Braverman's position and shifts the focus of analysis from the exploitative logic of *capitalist organisation* of labour to the complex, multilayered processual dynamic of *managerial control* without exploring how the latter is both a medium and outcome of the former (cf. Cohn, 1987). Storey's concept of totality usefully exposes Braverman's neglect of the political and ideological conditions of capitalist reproduction, yet fails to acknowledge and build upon Braverman's rudimentary analysis of the globalisation of the capitalist mode of production. Finally, the concept of social construction highlights the exclusion of 'the subjective' from Braverman's analysis, but then reproduces the unsatisfactory tension within *Labor and Monopoly Capital* between appeals to an essentialist theory of human nature and an objectivist analysis of the capitalist labour process.

Of greatest consequence, however, is Storey's marginalisation of what is arguably the most fundamental element of Marxian dialectics: the concept of *praxis*.⁶ Central to Marx's analysis of political economy is a commitment to emancipation. In Marx's well-known words, taken from the last of his *Theses on Feuerbach*, most thinkers 'have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to change it' (Marx, 1975: 423). From the standpoint of dialectics, a purely theoretical (that is, idealistic) appreciation of the socially constructed nature of reality is untenable, for it fails to recognise how theorising is rooted in – and promoted by – the practical, historical positioning of human beings in the world. Once this indivisible connection between ideas and action is grasped, the myth of trans-historical, disinterested knowledge is debunked and the human value of knowledge becomes the central issue. Knowledge is then no longer evaluated in terms of its contribution to an abstract, timeless truth (for example, interpreting the complex dynamics of management

control) but in terms of its practical, historical use value to incarnate, sensuous human beings (for example, transforming the exploitative confines of the capital-labour relation). The following sections provide an interpretation of Marxian dialectics as a basis for constructing a more adequate theoretical foundation for labour process analysis.

MARX'S MATERIALIST DIALECTICS: FROM DEHUMANISED TO EXPLOITED SUBJECTIVITY

(i) Materialist dialectics

Marx's dialectic of praxis is developed through a critique of the theory of estrangement developed by Hegel in *The Phenomenology of Mind* (1931). For Hegel, overcoming the estrangement of human beings from their own creations is conditional upon their understanding that consciousness of the object is a form of self-consciousness: in other words, the social institutions such as the state do not exist independently of the consciousness which defines and sustains their reality. According to Hegel, when the identity of self-consciousness and consciousness is understood by the subject, the estrangement of subject (wo/men) and object (social world) is overcome.

From Hegelian dialectics, the young Marx extracts and develops the thesis that the reality of the object is conditional upon the consciousness of the subject, but in so doing he rejects the 'mystical' idea that the alienation of subject and object can be abolished simply through knowledge of the interdependence of this relation. Opposing Hegel's abstracted, idealistic dialectic, Marx posits a sensuous, *materialist* dialectic in which estrangement is theorised as a concrete, historical phenomenon whose abolition requires a practical transformation of the material conditions which nurture its existence. The antitheses of subjectivism and objectivism, and of spiritualism and materialism, Marx argues, can be synthesised and transcended only through the catalyst of praxis. As he puts it (1975: 354), the resolution of these antitheses

is possible *only* in a *practical* way, only through the practical energy of man . . . their resolution is for that reason by no means a problem of knowledge, but a *real* problem of life which *philosophy* was unable to solve precisely because it treated it as a *purely* theoretical problem.

(ii) Dehumanised subjectivity

It has been noted how, in Marx's materialist dialectics, human beings are theorised as natural, *embodied* subjects endowed with 'natural powers' whose senses are formed and developed through a dialectical relationship with the objects of these senses (1975: 390). Separated from yet dependent upon nature, human beings are at once subjects and objects who are able to make of our activity 'an object of [our] will and consciousness' (ibid.: 328). The distinctive quality of human beings, Marx argues, is that we are endowed with both material needs and natural, vital powers which enable – and, indeed, condemn – us to make and remake both ourselves and our world.⁷ Unlike other animals, humans are 'species-beings' in the sense that

It is not only the material of my activity – including even the language in which the thinker is active – which I receive as a social product. My *own* existence is social activity. Therefore what I create for myself I create for society . . . (ibid.: 350)

However, while the human species is distinguished by the potential for 'free, conscious life activity' uncompelled by physical need, it is Marx's contention that the social (for example, capitalist) organisation of human labour so estranges us from this essential power that '*life activity, productive life* itself appears to man only as a *means* for the satisfaction of a need, the need to preserve physical existence' (1975: 328). More specifically, the accumulation of private property is seen to involve the continuous creation of 'new needs': 'each new product is a new *potentiality* of mutual fraud and mutual pillage' (ibid. 358) which 'seduces [the individual] into a new kind of enjoyment' (ibid.). Human sensuousness, the work of all previous history, is debased and desensitised: 'the man who is burdened with worries and needs has no *sense* for the finest of plays; the dealer in minerals sees only the commercial value, and not the beauty and peculiar nature of the minerals' (ibid.: 353). As a consequence, the enjoyment of *having* a (commodified) experience dominates and displaces the enjoyment of *being* a participant in the experience – even to the extent that the value of experience is assessed in terms of the price that must be paid for it (ibid.: 361).

Even in Marx's early writings, it is recognised that the accumulation logic of capitalist political economy places socially unnecessary constraints upon the provision of conditions and opportunities that

are beneficial to human beings (for example, an unpolluted environment; work and leisure that involve the expression of the full range of our natural powers and capacities). However, the dynamics of historical change are formulated primarily in terms of the contradiction between a generalised potentiality of human being (that is, the essential richness of the human senses) and the contemporary denial of this potentiality (that is, where 'the devaluation of the human world grows in direct proportion to the increase in value of the world of things' [1975: 324]). Accordingly, the young Marx is led to conclude that the intensification of estrangement within capitalist relations of production will produce a workers' revolution – or, as he puts it, the abolition of private property, which he associates with the presence of private property, 'is expressed in the political form of the emancipation of the workers' (ibid.: 333).⁸ Describing the contradictory organisation – and imminent collapse – of the capital–labour relationship in terms of the negation of the essential qualities of human beings, Marx writes:

On the one hand we have the production of human activity as *labour*, i.e. as an activity wholly alien to itself, to man and to nature, and hence to consciousness and vital expression, the *abstract* existence of man as a mere *workman* who therefore tumbles day after day from his unfulfilled nothingness into absolute nothingness, into his social and hence real non-existence; and on the other, the production of the object of human labour as *capital*, in which all the natural and social individuality of the object is *extinguished* . . . (i.e. has lost all political and social appearances and is not even *apparently* tainted with any human relationships. . . . This contradiction, driven to its utmost limit, is necessarily the limit, the culmination and the decline of the whole system of private property. (ibid.: 336–7)

The young Marx anticipates that the dehumanisation of human sensuousness alone will precipitate the revolutionary abolition of private property. This early understanding of an essential subjectivity which is *dehumanised* by the existence of private property develops, in Marx's mature writings, into a conception of subjectivity that is *exploited* within the capitalist mode of production. In the process, he understands himself to dispense with the last vestiges of (Hegelian) idealism. The early critique of Hegelian dialectics is founded upon a *purely theoretical* contradiction between the essential qualities of

human sensuousness (the development of the six senses) and the demands of capitalist institutions which, he anticipates, would itself ferment revolutionary change. What this understanding failed to appreciate, Marx later realised, was that the historical conditions in which workers live rarely afford them the opportunity to experience this contradiction. Although the contradiction might exist in principle (ideally), it is infrequently experienced in practice (materially). It was therefore necessary to look elsewhere – to the forces and relations of material existence – to identify the contradictions that would actually generate emancipatory change.

As we shall see, in his later writings Marx retains the understanding that human beings are distinguished by the capacity, and indeed the obligation, to ‘make life activity itself an object of [our] will and consciousness’ (1975: 390).⁹ However, the catalyst for negating the negation of ‘conscious life activity’ is identified within the historically specific contradictions *internal to the capitalist system*, including the contradiction between the (historically limited) possibilities for praxis opened by the capitalist mode of production and their (socially unnecessary) denial or distortion. The following section explores this development in Marx’s theorising before arguing that the later formulation of subjectivity courts the danger of throwing out the baby (the sensuous human being) with the bath water (the vestiges of idealism).

(iii) Exploited subjectivity

In his later writings, the focus of Marx’s attention shifts from the contradiction between the essential powers of human beings and the opportunities for their expression in capitalist society to the contradictions *within* the capitalist mode of production. By examining ‘the imminent laws of capitalist production’, the mature Marx seeks to lay bare their internal contradictions and tendential lines of development. More specifically, he is concerned to expose the systemic instability of the capitalist mode of production which is expressed in recurrent crises of overproduction, profit squeeze, and so forth.

To this end, Marx adopts an analytical perspective in which ‘*individuals are dealt with only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories, the bearers of particular class relations and interests*’ (Marx, 1976: 92; emphasis added). In this formulation, actors’ knowledge and pursuit of their ‘interests’ is perceived to be unproblematical, as is their reproduction of their ‘class relations’.

The capitalist is said to 'function only as personified capital, capital as person, just as the worker is no more than labour personified' (1976: 989). In turn this conception of actors' 'interests' and 'relations' leads Marx to anticipate that as the productive forces of capitalism develop, 'the centralization of the means of production and the socialization of labour reach a point at which they become incompatible with their capitalist integument' (ibid.: 929), an incompatibility which heralds a process of revolutionary transformation.¹⁰

The price that is paid for labour *appears* to be determined by the impersonal forces of the market. It is in order to expose the *exploitative* relations of production which lie behind the seeming neutrality and equality of market relations that Marx's analysis leaves the sphere of circulation 'where everything takes place on the surface and in full view of everyone' to examine how the 'consumption' of labour by capital produces both commodities and surplus value within 'the hidden abode of production' (1976: 279).

The analysis of the 'point of production' is critical because it is here that the power of labour is organised to ensure that it is expended on the production of commodities (goods and services that are saleable as well as usable) *and* that the value collectively added by labour in the process of production and/or delivery is greater than the wages it is paid. As Marx (ibid.: 293) observes of capitalist production:

Our capitalist has two objectives: in the first place, he wants to produce a use-value which has exchange-value, i.e. an article destined to be sold, a commodity; and secondly, he wants to produce a commodity greater in value than the sum of the values of the commodities used to produce it, namely the means of production and the labour-power he purchased with his good money on the open market. His aim is to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity; not only use-value but value; and not just value, but surplus-value.

Marx's mature analysis of the labour process stresses the exploitative nature of capitalist relations of production. However, while the emphasis is upon the difference between use values and commodities, and between human values and surplus value, he also retains his earlier understanding that capitalism denies and distorts essential human needs and potentials. He notes, for example, how the requirement of capital to pump surplus from labour tends to turn the worker into 'a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill

as in a forcing-house, *through the suppressions of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations*' (1976: 481; emphasis added). Later he elaborates this argument:

within the capitalist system all methods for raising the social productivity of labour . . . alienate [the worker] from the intellectual potentialities of the labour process. . . . Accumulation of wealth at one pole is, therefore, at the same time accumulation of misery, the torment of labour, slavery, ignorance, brutalization and moral degradation at the opposite pole. (ibid.: 799)

In *Capital* Marx also explores how, when labour becomes a commodity to be exchanged in the market, workers themselves come to perceive the means of production upon which they depend for their subsistence not as a product of their collective labour power but, rather, as an alien property – as an autonomous power, personified in its owner (ibid.: 1003). His analyses of the labour process and of commodity fetishism allow Marx to harbour few illusions about the difficulties to be encountered in adequately understanding the capitalist mode of production and organising effective resistance to its subordinating effects. The mature Marx recognises that workers do not necessarily or immediately recognise their experience as dulling and degrading; nor do they necessarily attribute this experience to the exploitative structure of the capital–labour relation. Rather, there is a tendency, promoted by capitalist ideologues and educators, to interpret this experience as a natural and inevitable effect of impersonal forces – such as the operation of the market, the technologies demanded by progress or the inescapable demands of the human condition. Even when workers question this understanding and ‘try to organise planned co-operation’, Marx notes how their efforts are continuously blocked or undermined by the determination of the apologists of capital to defend the ‘“sacred” law of supply and demand’ (ibid.: 793) – through appeals to the self-interested reasoning of bourgeois ideologies in the first instance but, if necessary, by resorting to ‘forcible means’ (ibid.: 794).

None the less, the belief that the internal contradictions of the capitalist system would become increasingly transparent, and correspondingly difficult to rationalise and control, sustained Marx’s confidence in the inevitability of the collapse and a revolutionary overthrow of capitalist relations of production. As the ‘technical application of science’ expands, as the scale of production increases,

as markets become internationalised and the mass of workers are obliged to seek employment in a comparatively small number of giant corporations, Marx anticipates that the conditions necessary for the effective organisation and revolt of the working class would eventually arrive:

Along with the constant decrease in the number of capitalist magnates, who usurp and monopolise all the advantages of this process of transformation, the mass of misery, oppression, slavery, degradation and exploitation grows; but with this there also grows the revolt of the working class, a class constantly increasing in numbers, and *trained, united and organized by the very mechanisms of the capitalist process of production*. . . . The knell of capitalist private property sounds. The expropriators are expropriated. (1976: 929; emphasis added)

(iv) Summary

Marx's early understanding of the dialectics of praxis is informed by a humanist/idealist assumption that human beings are endowed with a capacity of 'conscious life activity' which, when denied by the demands of the capitalist relations of production, would prompt a revolutionary transformation. Experienced as suffering, estrangement would arouse passion, a passion for emancipation which Marx (1975) describes as 'man's essential power vigorously striving to attain its object' (ibid.: 390). The heightening of the tension between essence and existence is thus expected to produce an intensity of suffering that will drive human beings to overthrow the capitalist system. The mature Marx expands and revises this view by arguing that it is not the contradictions between essence and existence but the contradictions experienced by actors as 'bearers of particular class-relations and interests' (ibid.: 92) which govern the dynamics of emancipatory change. Accordingly, Marx focuses upon the grip of commodity fetishism in the sphere of circulation and the brutalising effects of the labour process in the sphere of production. In so doing he retains the notion that human beings have essential potentialities from which they are alienated within the ensemble of capitalist relations of production, but he no longer supposes that the experience of this tension will, of itself, precipitate change.

In this light, the mature work can be read as the outcome of an intellectual struggle to develop a more adequate, historically contex-

tualised understanding of the dialectic of praxis and the possibilities for (its) emancipation. In the following section, I draw together some central strands of this reading of Marx to advance an alternative formulation of subjectivity and the dialectic of praxis. This is done through a selective retrieval and critique of his conception of wo/men as natural, embodied beings whose senses are formed and developed through interaction with nature. It will be argued that the analytical framework developed by the mature Marx has the considerable merit of avoiding the nonsense of analyses that are founded upon the 'freedom' and 'responsibilities' of the private individual, the hero of bourgeois humanism. However, in relying upon a highly abstracted and formalised conception of 'class relations' and 'interests', Marx's analysis fails to penetrate the sensuous, material reality of the interpersonal process of production and circulation through which the complex dynamics of the capitalist system are practically articulated and reproduced.

SUBJECTIVITY AND THE DIALECTICS OF PRAXIS

For the reasons outlined above, the mature Marx pursued the analytical strategy of dealing with individuals only as the bearers of class-relations and interests. This strategy, I want to argue, involves significant theoretical losses as well as important gains. Whilst it provides a valuable corrective to bourgeois humanism in which the individual is seen to be free to determine his or her fate, attending to individuals 'only in so far as they are the personification of economic categories' (1976: 92) tends to discount the value of his earlier, more complex formulation of the constitution of subjectivity – a formulation which, despite its idealist limitations (which the mature Marx corrects), embraces the self-production of human labour through its relation with *nature/self* as well as through relations with others.

As Marx observes, processes of subjugation (and emancipation) are possible precisely because 'man is not only a natural being' (Marx, 1975: 391). Whereas the existence and evolution of other beings is at the mercy of blind forces of nature which render them powerless to change the conditions that occasion their suffering, to be human is to stand both within and outside nature: human nature is endowed with the unique capability of attending to, and directing, its experience as an object and as a subject. This unique ontology opens up and continuously extends possibilities for the cultivation of our

senses. The qualities and possibilities of human senses are thus a product of their social, historical development. Those developments are a condition of our present existence; and, in turn, the use of our senses in human labour contributes simultaneously to our individual and social development.

Marx's analysis of the capitalist mode of production reveals the constitution of human beings whose self-understanding is that of free, independent agents who relate to both the natural and social worlds as '*alien*' resources for the realisation of their *private purposes*. Contrasting capitalism with previous societies, Marx observes, in the opening pages of the *Grundrisse*, that:

The more deeply we go back into our history, the more does the individual, and hence also the producing individual, appear as dependent, as belonging to a greater whole: in a still quite natural way in the family and in the family expanded into the clan; then later in the various forms of communal society arising out of the antitheses and fusions of the clans. Only in the eighteenth century, in 'civil society', do the various forms of social connectedness confront the individual as a mere means towards his private purposes. But the epoch which produces this standpoint, that of the isolated individual, is also precisely that of the hitherto most developed social (from this standpoint, general) relations. The human being is in the most literal sense a political animal, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. (Marx, 1973: 84)

Of course, Marx does not deny that before the eighteenth century human beings were 'self-conscious'. His point is that *the capitalist mode of production systematically constitutes the isolated individual who confronts society as 'a mere means of his private purposes'*. This thesis is expanded in *Capital*, where Marx contends that:

the exchange of commodities implies no other relations of dependence than those which result from its own nature. . . . In order that its possessor may sell it as a commodity, he must have it at his disposal, he must be the free proprietor of his own labour-capacity, hence of his person. . . . He must constantly treat his labour-power as his own property, his own commodity. . . . In this way he manages both to alienate his labour-power and to avoid renouncing his rights of ownership over it. (Marx, 1976: 271)

Marx argues that capitalism is characterised by the institutionalisation of a form of labour which is 'free' to exchange its power for a wage. As noted earlier, it is in order to expose the limits of human freedom in the context of the capitalist mode of production that Marx turns from an examination of the sphere of circulation or commodity exchange to the 'hidden abode' of production, for he is then able to show how this seemingly free exchange of labour for a wage is the very basis of the systematic, exploitative extraction of a surplus by its purchasers (capital). Or, as Marx (1976: 280) vividly expresses it, the freedom to exchange his labour enables the worker to bring 'his own hide to market, and now has nothing else to expect but – a tanning'. Unfortunately Marx's inattentiveness to the consequences of individualisation for the existential dimension of praxis leads him to overlook the extent to which labour, when rendered vulnerable by its self-understanding as a free and independent agent, may come to interpret the experience of a 'tanning' as tolerable and even as desirable. His assumption is that the experience of wage labour can only deny, and can never confirm, the subjectivity of human beings. To be sure, in his later writings Marx stresses how commodity fetishism can mystify or obscure an awareness of alienation. Accordingly, he places greater emphasis upon the internal, systemic contradictions of capitalism as the catalyst of revolutionary change. None the less, as the previous block citation suggests, he clings to the idea that there is some ahistorical essence of human labour power which is unambiguously alienated when commodified as wage labour.

A related deficiency of Marx's appreciation of the dialectics of praxis concerns his emphasis upon labour's physical existence to the neglect of its symbolic existence. For example, when examining wage labour he argues that in its alienated form, 'life activity' appears only as a means for the satisfaction of 'the need to preserve physical existence' (Marx, 1975: 328). At one level this emphasis is excusable, because it stresses how labour tends to be reduced to the instrumental provision of subsistence, but at another it is deficient in its cavalier disregard for other, symbolic aspects of the worker's existence to which s/he may be strongly attached, and will therefore seek to defend. Of course, the identity of the worker bears the marks of the contradictions of the institutions in which identity is constituted and solidified. However, routinely, the desire to defend and enhance valued aspects of this identity may tend to conserve, rather than challenge, the assumptions (for example, of possessive individualism) which underpin the status quo. Such desires may prove to be

problematic for the agents of capitalism – for example, when they seek the restructuring of industries or of working practices. But the capacity of resistance fuelled by these desires to promote progressive, emancipatory change is, to say the least, debatable.

The comparative neglect of labour's symbolic existence or identity is also evident in Marx's brief examination of the implications of production for consumption. Having made the telling point that consumer goods 'not only produce an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object' (Marx, 1973: 92), he does not follow this through with a consideration of 'the production of subjects' for the reproduction of the capital-labour relation. Certainly, he recognises that self-consciousness, in the form of individualisation, is magnified within capitalist relations of production (Marx, 1976: 163 ff.), but he omits to integrate within his analysis the 'consumption' of the self as a social, fetishised product which, like the consumer good, 'beckons' to the subject as a powerful 'aim-determining need' (Marx, 1973: 92). Yet, as Foucault (1982: 208) has observed 'There are two meanings of the word *subject* . . . subject to someone else by control and dependence, and tied to his own identity by a conscience or self-knowledge. Both meanings suggest a form of power which subjugates and makes subject to'.

The second meaning of 'subject' sensitises us to the ways in which we may become subjugated as our sense of self is shaped and attachments to this experiential and symbolic sense of self become strengthened – a disciplinary process whose 'rewards' are often conditional upon maintaining existing definitions and distributions of valued material and symbolic resources. In a way which parallels the fetishism of commodities, where the social characteristics of human labour take on the appearance of 'objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves' (Marx, 1976: 164–5), *the fetishism of identity* disregards the social process through which identity-formation and reproduction are accomplished.

To illustrate the idea of identity fetishism, we can adapt the example used by Marx to illuminate commodity fetishism: wood as a material which can take on the mysterious commodity form of a table. Human sensuousness is substituted for 'wood' and a social identity is substituted for 'table':

The form of human sensuousness, for instance, is altered if an identity is made out of it. Nevertheless the identity continues to be human sensuousness, and ordinary, sensuous being. But as soon as

it emerges as a social identity, it changes into a thing which transcends consciousness. The human being not only stands with its feet on the ground, but, in relation to all other beings, it stands on its head, and evolves out of its sensuous brain grotesque ideas . . . (ibid.: 163)

In the case of identity fetishism, the ideas are 'grotesque' because the commodification/solidification of subjectivity disregards the continuous process of its constitution. Crucially, this involves self-deception in which subjectivity as a sensuous process is identified as an objective characteristic of subjectivity, as a given identity.¹¹ To argue against Marx, this insight alerts us to the importance of reflecting more deeply upon the significance of the open, dialectical ontology of human beings for promoting the desire to preserve our symbolic (and physical) existence, and thus to reproduce the institutions that provide *this* security, as well as the desire to change the institutions which are perceived to undermine it.

So, without denying that socially unnecessary suffering is incurred by the continuation of the exploitation endemic to capitalist relations of production, it is necessary to highlight the absence within Marx's analysis of any sustained consideration of the negative implications of self-mediation for radical change.¹² While Marx pays great attention to the (historically conditioned) potential for emancipation provided by 'self-mediation', he says almost nothing about the insecurities which attend both the experience of subject-object separation and our attraction to socially mediated, self-defeating methods of dealing with this experience. Social relations *alone* are deemed responsible for actions associated with the negative human emotions of anxiety, guilt, envy, greed, aggression and so forth, as if social relations were constructed out of some supra-human substance. For these negative possibilities are attributed *exclusively* to the existence of private property in general and to the capital-labour relation in particular:

Under the system of private property . . . each person speculates on creating a new need in the other, with the aim of forcing him to make a new sacrifice, placing him in a new dependence and seducing him into a new kind of enjoyment. . . . With the mass of objects grows the realm of alien powers to which man is subjected, and each new product is a new potentiality of mutual fraud and mutual pillage. (Marx, 1975: 358; first emphasis added)

More specifically and paradoxically, Marx fails to theorise in any detail the conditions of the production of labour power. Labour power, he writes, is 'the aggregate of those mental and physical capabilities existing in the physical form, the living personality, of a human being, capabilities which he sets in motion whenever he produces a use-value of any kind' (Marx, 1976: 270). On this account, labour power comprises a set of abstract capabilities whose existence is deducted from the production of use values. It is these capabilities, in the form of commodified skills, and so on, for which the worker seeks a buyer in the labour market. Largely overlooked is the social construction of these capabilities and their significance for the worker.

Of course, Marx is well aware that the mental and physical capabilities of human beings are socially produced. As he rightly stresses (1973: 156), 'private interest is already a socially determined interest, which can be achieved only within the conditions laid down by society and with the means provided by society'. But he omits consideration of how the constitution of private interest both feeds off, and fuels, anxieties about identity. Revealingly, his analysis of the reproduction of labour power is limited, in the main, to a discussion of its *physical* replenishment, a level which is recognised to be relative to 'the habits and expectations with which the class of free workers has been formed' (ibid.: 275). Passing reference is made to the 'special education or training' (ibid.: 276) of developed types of labour, but even here the emphasis is upon its relevance for performing tasks in paid employment.

As Marx anticipated, the labour of monopoly capitalism is encouraged to experience and understand itself atomistically – as individuals, each of whom has a right to compete with others to acquire scarce and valued resources. This is perhaps most transparent in the emphasis upon career and in the passing of 'populist' employment legislation which, in principle, promotes an equality of opportunity by removing discrimination against the individual (Strinati, in this volume). Such moves draw upon – and further promote – the constitution of modern subjects who live out the contradictions of believing that in monopoly capitalist society the freedom and independence of individuals not only exists but is protected. Possessive individualism flourishes: the modern subject experiences an asociological, isolating sense of personal responsibility for succeeding (and failing) and, relatedly, is confirmed through engaging in instrumental, self-interested forms of collectivism.

From this perspective, the contradiction between vulnerability and security within the fetishism of atomistic identity, no less than the contradiction between labour power and wage labour within the fetishism of abstracted commodities, is understood to inform struggles – individual or collective, expressive or instrumental – to preserve or transform the capitalist mode of production. For the constitution of individualised subjectivities pursuing private interests stimulates the desire to secure and solidify this individualised self in available social identities. It is not just the identity of commodities but the commodification of identities that requires critical deconstruction if the experiences of fear, aggression and denial arising from the pursuit of private interest are to be transmuted into energy that addresses the vulnerability of our contradictory relation to nature through a communal strategy of compassion and the productive power of more symmetrical relations of interdependence.

To summarise: the experience of separation offers the very possibility of constituting a social world, including the sense of self. It also makes possible critical reflection upon the (re)production of our social existence and provides for the possibility of transforming the relational means of this reproduction. Negatively, however, the anxiety associated with the contradictory relation to nature prompts the (self-defeating) search to secure the self in a coherent identity, a search which is stimulated by the production of ‘independent’ individuals in capitalist society. In the remainder of this chapter, I develop the thesis that capitalist labour processes are not simply a medium for the production of profitable goods and services; they are also the outcome of, and are conditional upon, the efforts of workers and managers to organise their respective subjectivities – subjectivities which are conditioned both by the experience of subject–object separation and their positioning within, and attachment to, contradictory social positions. In the next section, I illuminate and apply this perspective by showing how efforts to theorise subjectivity by a number of influential post-Braverman labour process analysts have been constrained by their inadequate theorising of this second, ‘existential’ dimension of social reproduction.

THE SUBJECTIVITY OF LABOUR: FRIEDMAN, CRESSEY AND MACINNES, BURAWOY, AND POLLERT

(i) Friedman

In his analysis of management strategies, Friedman distinguishes between 'Direct Control' and 'Responsible Autonomy', a distinction which is derived from an essentialist theory of subjectivity. Contradictions within these strategies – manifested as resistance – are also explained in terms of the essential peculiarities of human labour, peculiarities which are denied or distorted by strategies of management control. Thus, the limitation of management strategies are said to 'stem from their common aim, to maintain and extend managerial authority over people who *are essentially free and independent*, but who have alienated (sold) their labour capacity' (Friedman, 1984: 99; emphasis added).

Friedman argues that 'Responsible Autonomy' strategies are contradictory because they harbour the pretence that workers are not alienated from their labour power, and that there is no conflict of interest between the objectives of employers and employees. On the other side, 'Direct Control' strategies are contradictory because they treat workers as if they are machines that are indifferent to such treatment.

Without denying that wo/man's contradictory, open relationship to nature differentiates us from other elements of nature (such as those which are fashioned into machines), it is necessary to reflect critically upon the contention that the content and limits of management strategies can be adequately understood by relating forms of control and resistance to the idea that human beings are 'essentially free and independent'. Against this ahistorical formulation of the qualities of human labour, and its significance for the formation of management strategies, it may be argued that actions which are deemed to be expressive of such essential freedom and independence are socially organised and identified, not ontologically given (Knights and Willmott, 1976). On this view, expressions of 'freedom and independence' are a product of particular, historical relations in which human beings are encouraged to experience and interpret their existence as free, independent agents – an independence whose authenticity is perceived to be demonstrated and exercised in the 'free choice' of employment (amongst other things). From this perspective, 'freedom' and 'independence' are not essential qualities

of human labour power. Rather, they are socially produced qualities which arise from, but cannot be identified with, the peculiarly open, contradictory relationship between human beings and nature. Or, to put this more precisely, the presence of 'freedom' and 'independence' is a dialectically constituted outcome of the existential and historical dimensions of social existence: the contradictory relationship with nature which makes human existence both possible and problematic, and the contradictions arising from the historical contradictions within the institutions developed by human beings in response to their experience of their separation from nature. Although Giddens has not integrated this insight into his theory of structuration (Willmott, 1986), he has articulated it with exceptional lucidity:

Human beings exist in a contradictory relation to nature because they are in and of nature, as corporeal beings existing in material environments; yet at the same time they are set off against nature as having a 'second nature' of their own irreducible to physical objects and events. This contradiction . . . has its universal expression in the finitude of *Dasein* as the negation of the apparent infinity of time-space in which each human life makes its fleeting appearance. . . . But the relation between *Dasein* and the continuity of Being is always mediated: by society, or the institutions in terms of which, in the duality of structure, social reproduction is carried on. The existential contradiction of human existence thus becomes translated into structural contradiction, which is really its only medium. (Giddens, 1979: 161; emphasis omitted)

Our open relationship to nature, expressed in 'the negation of the apparent infinity of time-space', is not to be confused with an essential 'freedom' and 'independence'. The contradictory relationship to nature is politically neutral in its implications for relations of freedom or servitude. Its effects can fuel the struggle for freedom, but they can also foster a desire to negate the problematic openness of human existence by continuing to seek security within oppressive, historically contradictory institutions. In this light, management strategies are seen to be historically, not essentially, contradictory. That is to say, they are contradictory in so far as they constitute labour in ways which simultaneously promote and deny certain socially defined attributes – such as its 'freedom' and its 'independence'. Where such attributes are defined as real and legitimate their socially produced existence has real consequences, including res-

istance to controls which are perceived to undermine their value or inhibit their expression.

As Friedman rightly points out, the organisation and control of labour is not without contradiction. However, the contradiction is not between some 'essence' of human nature and the demands of the capitalist mode of production. Rather, as the mature Marx recognised, contradictions arise from within the system, or totality, of social relations. Workers' resistance to the requirements of management cannot be adequately understood as a response to the denial of some 'essential' need or will. Rather, the potential for resistance arises when subjects are constituted whose experience and self-understanding are denied or undermined by the demands being placed upon them – demands which are themselves mediated by the subjectivity of management (amongst others). The scope and direction of these struggles is always conditioned by the ways in which each party experiences and understands its identity, a self-consciousness which is shaped by the interpenetration of the historical and existential dimensions of social existence.

(ii) Cressey and MacInnes

Cressey and MacInnes (1980) have mounted an important challenge to the idea that labour is simply a given capacity which capital systematically exploits – for example, by controlling its wilfulness or by taking advantage of its malleability. In particular, they have been critical of the thesis, sketched by Marx and strongly endorsed by Braverman, that the development of capitalism involves transformation from a formal to a real subordination of labour in which 'the subjective factor of the labour process is removed to a place among its inanimate objective factors' (Braverman, 1974: 171). Against this view, Cressey and MacInnes argue that the capital-labour relation is inescapably one of interdependence, albeit asymmetrical interdependence. This is because capital remains dependent upon the labour force for its value-creating activity: its 'social productivity'. Rather than conceptualising capitalist development as an inevitable progression from a formal to a real subordination of labour, Cressey and MacInnes recommend that the process of change is theorised in terms of capital's contradictory relation to labour, in which capital is obliged to promote the co-operation of labour even as it alienates it. Or, as they put it:

To develop the forces of production capital *must seek to develop labour as a subjective force* to unleash labour's power of social productivity rather than abolish these powers. Thus in the use-value aspect of its relation with labour capital will seek a purely cooperative relationship in order to abolish the antagonism between the worker and the means of production that its capitalist form throws up (Cressey and MacInnes, 1980:13).

The development of labour as a 'subjective force', Cressey and MacInnes observe, is facilitated by the labour's contradictory relationship to capital. From 'the exchange-value aspect', they identify a direct antagonism in which labour seeks 'to resist its subordination to the goal of valorisation through the reduction of labour to a pure commodity'. However, from 'the use-value aspect', labour experiences a dual dependency upon capital. For, in addition to labour's material interest in preserving 'the viability of the unit of capital which employs it', this dependence is increased to the extent to which the type of employment offers opportunities for 'self-expression': 'The degree of this interest [in maintaining the capital-labour relationship] will increase *with the skill and scope for self-expression* (distorted as it is within the capitalist form) that the job provides' (ibid.: 15, emphasis added).

In sum, by attending to the 'subjective', 'use-value' aspect of the capital-labour relationship, Cressey and MacInnes develop a functionalist analysis of the value to capital and labour of forms of work organisation which do not conform to the requirements of a real subordination of labour. They are critical of the theorising which informs the projected transition from a formal to a real subordination of labour because it is inattentive to capital's dependence upon the social productivity of labour – a dependence which necessitates a design of jobs that secures labour's co-operation. Co-operation is gained not simply by providing employment but by also by designing work in ways that present opportunities for the exercise of skill and self-expression.

The importance of Cressey and MacInnes's contribution to the labour process debate resides in their recognition of how labour's co-operation is facilitated by its 'subjective' dependence upon capital. However, their contribution is limited by a failure to raise subjectiv-

ity as a problem. Certainly, they recognise the significance of opportunities for 'self-expression' for the reproduction of the capitalist mode of production, but their consideration of this 'subjective' aspect of the capital-labour relationship is restricted to an abstract consideration of the tensions and continuities between 'labour power' and 'wage labour'. In other words, their analysis of this 'subjective aspect' is founded upon the assumption of a difference between 'the real subject' and 'the alienated subject'. Accordingly, the meaning of 'self-expression' is unproblematic: the self of the worker is equated with a romantic/humanist conception of labour power which is distorted/alienated within its wage form. This essentialist theory of the subject, which Cressey and MacInnes share with Friedman (amongst others), forgets that the self and its expression are historically constituted. Workers place a value upon opportunities for exercising skill and self-expression because they have been, and continue to be, subjects who have been constituted to value themselves in these terms, and not because there is some *essential* use value in doing so.

Relatedly, because Cressey and MacInnes equate self-expression with a romantic/humanist conception of labour power, they assume that from the standpoint of labour it is only the opportunities for exercising 'skill' and 'self-expression' (albeit distorted) which are valued. In so doing they overlook the ways in which subjects may also value routines which are 'deskilling' and seemingly devoid of 'self-expression'. Such an explanation, it has been suggested, requires an appreciation of the significance of 'existential' contradictions in the reproduction of the capitalist labour process – contradictions which may be placated (or heightened) through participation in the mundane practices of working life. Rather than analysing opportunities for autonomy from managerial control as limited and distorting opportunities for 'self-expression', as Cressey and MacInnes recommend, it is necessary to deconstruct the idea of the self that is said to seek its expression through these practices. More specifically, it is instructive to consider the extent to which such opportunities are valued for the sense of security associated with a confirmation of the social identity of 'self'. Such an analysis brings to consciousness an awareness of how this process of 'identity fetishism' (see above) has the unintended consequence of concealing from labour the extent to which its pursuit of such opportunities has the contradictory effect of reinforcing its dependence upon capital.

(iii) Burawoy

In some significant respects, the preceding critiques of Friedman and Cressey and MacInnes bear a resemblance to Burawoy's (1979) analysis of the manufacture of consent. Burawoy, it will be recalled, argues that employees are tied into the capitalist labour process by their participation in the game of getting 'one up' on the system of production, a game that depends upon the continuing operation of the capitalist system. In particular, Burawoy emphasises how consent is manufactured because workers' lived experience is one of choice, not of coercion.¹³ Clearly this argument also parallels – and lends empirical support to – the idea that opportunities for 'responsible autonomy' and 'self-expression' play a significant role in the strategic control of labour. Without questioning the thesis shared by Burawoy, Friedman, and Cressey and MacInnes (amongst many others) that the co-operation and productivity of labour may be enhanced by less obtrusive, more flexible forms of discipline, I want to show how Burawoy's analysis may be advanced through an appreciation of the interpenetration of the historical and existential dimensions of social existence.

Central to Burawoy's analysis is an emphasis upon the changing organisation and control of labour processes within monopoly capitalist societies. Despotic regimes, in which the subordination of labour takes a coercive, 'real' form, are replaced by hegemonic regimes in which a strategy of direct control is replaced by forms of work organisation (for example, job rotation and job enlargement) in which the worker is presented with 'an expansion of choices within ever narrower limits' (1979: 94). This thesis is illustrated through an examination of the game of 'making-out'. Burawoy shows how this game involved more than just achieving a quota: it also offered opportunities for 'playing' the system, and often for competing 'successfully' with it. In turn, this promoted a very strong desire amongst workers to enforce the agreed rules of the game, and thereby ensure its continuation. The unintended consequence of fulfilling this desire was the reproduction of the existing, exploitative structure of production relations.

However, despite the central importance attributed to the process of making choices for his analysis of labour processes, Burawoy fails to theorise why the experience of making choices, albeit within narrower limits, should be so attractive and beguiling to workers who

otherwise, it is implied, would withhold their consent. Instead, he draws upon an essentialist theory of human nature (ibid.: 157) to provide a functionalist explanation of the attractiveness of choice in terms of its compensation for the deprivations imposed by the capitalist labour process. Thus he is content to observe, without further reflection, that the attraction of making choices lies in 'a very limited but nonetheless *critical freedom* in [workers'] adaptation to the labor process', an adaptation which offers them 'a way of *reducing the level of deprivation*' (ibid.: 199; emphasis added).

Potentially, Burawoy's attentiveness to workers' perception of freedom (and the associated 'expansion of choices within ever narrower limits' [ibid.: 94]) focuses attention upon the importance of identity in the reproduction of relations of production. However, instead of relating the importance of the (illusion) of choice for securing the social identity (and self-image) of the worker as a capable and responsible person, his explanation of consent combines the most dubious element in Marx's early philosophical anthropology (the natural urge for self-realisation through productive activity) with the psychologicistic apologia of industrial sociology (that games are devised by workers and condoned by managers because they offer real compensations for the deprivations of work). This is not to deny that productive activity is generally necessary for survival, or that it can provide a sense of fulfilment and development. However, it is also necessary to recognise that what is experienced as 'fulfilling' and 'developing' will depend upon the social constitution of the subjectivity of the worker; and that work, like any other activity, can become psychologically enslaving even where there is little or no external compulsion. Indeed, it is probably a mistake to assume that choice, even within broader limits, is invariably welcomed, or that its erosion is universally resented. What can be said is that expressions of resentment and resistance are more likely when subjectivity is historically constituted to know and expect an experience of choosing such that its absence is experienced as a threat or affront to the sense of identity or self-image.

In this light, the attraction of the game, and the concern to defend its rules, is understood to reflect the historical constitution of subjectivity that experiences the absence of choice as a threat to identity – in much the same way that the consumer, within the sphere of circulation, is jealous of the opportunity to make choices in the marketplace. The defence of the game can be seen as a response to

the threat posed by the disruption of the productive process to the identities and self-images that exist outside work – identities which are sustained through the material and symbolic rewards associated with continuing participation in the productive process.¹⁴

(iv) Pollert

In *Girls, Wives, Factory Lives*, the experience of ‘factory girls’ is related to their occupancy of a social position in which exploitation is overlaid by sexual oppression. This position, Pollert argues, is shaped not only by ‘hidden curricula’ in schools (for example, carpentry and metalwork are less accessible to girls) but also by the more pervasive and pernicious gendering of roles in which (working-class) girls are prepared, and actively prepare themselves for, the marriage market rather than the labour market (cf. Willis, 1977). Although ‘the girls’ are highly-critical of their oppressors – both management and men – the translation of their criticisms into effective action is found to be very limited or is undermined by themselves, a phenomenon which Pollert theorises exclusively in terms of their disadvantaged position which leads them to collude with the patriarchal and class stereotypes of ‘women workers’.

Without denying the thrust of Pollert’s thesis, I want to suggest that our understanding of the reproduction of the capitalist labour process can be advanced by a complementary consideration of the ‘existential’ dimension of the dialectics of praxis. Consider, for example, Pollert’s observation (1981: 101) that on the shop floor ‘femininity and attractiveness were endlessly discussed: fashion, hair, skin, bodies, diets, slimming’. At one level, this observation is rightly interpreted in the context of sexual domination and the exploitation of women as male-constituted consumers of commodities that are promoted as means of enhancing their ‘femininity’. Their historical positioning within a patriarchal form of capitalist production relations leads ‘the girls’ to confirm a market-filtered, male-orientated ideal of femininity.

However, because Pollert interprets the subjectivity of these women workers exclusively in terms of their historical positioning within the relations of patriarchy and class, her analysis of the girls’ practices fails to appreciate how, in addition to providing the contemporary equivalent of the opium of religion for people occupying positions of subordination and/or exploitation, the fetishism of social identity (for example, of femininity) is appealing precisely

because it offers solutions (albeit illusory or temporary) to anxieties which arise from the self-defeating effort to secure or solidify self in social identity.

Of course, the particular content of identity is historically constituted. Anxieties about femininity, for example, are fuelled by a (male-inspired) definition, or ideal, of what is acceptably feminine. Pollert's study provides a penetrating insight into why many women, occupying a subordinate position, are preoccupied with this particular identity (because this is the identity promoted by those who dominate them). But unless it is assumed that all anxieties about identity are dissolved with the removal of domination, this does not adequately explain why people should be concerned to secure themselves in a social identity – which in this case happens to be a product of patriarchal relations of power.

Certainly, it is implausible to deny that either the content or the strength of insecurities about identity are unassociated with the existence of asymmetrical relations of power. For, quite apart from the basic material insecurities associated with economic dependence, a characteristic of such relations is the construction of ideals (for example, a male/consumer-centric ideal of femininity and attractiveness) which, through a process of identification by those occupying positions of relative dominance, serve to discipline the subjectivity of subordinates. However, it is not less implausible to suggest that reproduction of power relations is unconnected to the existential problem which arises from our open, contradictory relationship to nature. This problem better explains why it is that subordinates (and superordinates) are inclined to seek security through an identification with ideals, even though their material effect is to commit them to reproducing an oppressive structure of relationships.

Identification with many of the ideals generated within capitalist society is anxiety-provoking because of their emphasis upon the freedom and responsibility of individuals to achieve their own identity/destiny. There is no fixed, ascribed identity. In so far as the residues of formal constraint upon individual advancement remain – in the form of racism and sexism – they have become the principal targets of organised resistance and reform, a resistance that has reinforced and legitimised the bourgeois ideals of freedom and equality. However, the realisation of these ideals continues to be problematic. First, because in the pursuit of these ideals individuals confront the substantive institutionalised constraints of capitalism, racism and sexism; second because, in common with the factory girls'

desire to attain the ideal of femininity of which they would always fall short, the effort to define and secure self in any social identity (for example, individual attainment or success) itself creates the very conditions of insecurity (for example, the possibility of personal failure) from which the effort to conform more closely to this ideal appears to offer an escape.

DISCUSSION

It has been suggested that all social identities, both those associated with radical change and those embraced by Pollert's factory girls, may be prized because, consciously or otherwise, they offer a form of security – a means of answering for self and others the question 'Who am I?' or 'How am I doing?'. A recent analysis of the relationship between subjectivity and social regulation is helpful in providing a further illumination of this critique. In *Changing the Subject*, Henriques *et al.* (1984) argue that the normative practice of attributing social identities to human beings (for example, gender roles) tends to promote both a desire for the confirmation of these identities and an experience of tension when competing and contradictory social positions are occupied.¹⁵ It is noted how modern subjects are the bearers of multiple and contradictory positions (worker, lover, mother, daughter, friend and so on). This condition is said to 'produce anxiety states . . . and the consequent desire for wholeness, unitariness – a coherent identity' (ibid.: 225). At the same time, however, this desire for a stable unitary, solidified identity tends to be satisfied by seeking the occupancy of secure but oppressive positions:

we are produced as capable of assertive action, yet also fragile and acutely vulnerable. . . . Both the fear of this vulnerability and the search for what I have loosely called positions from which we may maximise our relative powers of assertion contribute to our ineffable tendency to adopt positions which are not in other ways advantageous, to seek security in what is familiar, to hark back to the past; it is why change is so difficult. (Ibid.: 321)

Here Henriques *et al.* highlight the peculiar qualities of the modern subject. Our individualisation produces subjects who are seemingly capable of autonomous action, yet who are also acutely vulnerable

because we are held (and hold ourselves) individually responsible for our actions. Historically, this vulnerability can be accounted for by the demands of a capitalist system for individuals who treat their labour power as their own property. Existentially, this treatment is both seductive and contradictory, for in appearing to increase the scope for self-determination, it simultaneously augments our isolation and vulnerability. Potentially, this provides a stimulus for critical reflection upon the structure of social relations that promotes such tensions. However, the strength of our attachment to our precious individuality, which is continuously reinforced by the demands of the capitalist mode of production, tends to lead us to adopt positions 'which are not in other ways advantageous, to seek security in what is familiar, to hark back to the past; it is why change is so difficult' (ibid.: 321).

In earlier sections, it has been argued that this response is self-defeating – not simply because individuals occupy positions which are multiple and contradictory, and therefore resistant to coherence and stability, nor just because individuals have 'an ineffable tendency' to seek security in what is familiar (ibid.). Rather, it is self-defeating because security is founded upon an identity fetishism which is blind to the inescapable openness of subjectivity. This 'imaginary' identification is difficult to deny or deconstruct – either because every interaction confirms its reality, or because the experience of its precariousness serves to reinforce the reality of individualisation and the desire to achieve a social position that is perceived to provide more adequate protection. When captivated by identity fetishism, there is a process of continuous reinvestment in which the sense of a continuous, solid self is maintained at the expense of confining our experience within limits that support this confirmation. While appearing to offer reassurance, this strategy has the effect of reproducing the institutions through which the sense of individuality is constituted and thus renders us vulnerable to subsequent disconfirmations. Instead of penetrating this contradictory fetishism of identity, and thereby releasing ourselves from the unequal and unwinnable struggle of securing subjectivity in social identity, we direct our efforts to maintaining the social conditions required for its confirmation.

In the context of a capitalist mode of production, this self-defeating search for security in a coherent identity is routinely sponsored through such individualising institutions as 'career' as others (for example, the employer or his agent) seek a reproduction of their

power and identity through us (the employee or the consumer). For this reason, it makes little sense to analyse them independently of one another – as, for example, Marx inclines to do, especially in his mature writings. By reducing the dialectics of praxis to the struggles promoted by positioning within the structures of social relations, labour process theory has overlooked the presence of existential tensions in the reproduction of capitalist relations of production. In turn, this has marginalised the significance of the stimulus for critical reflection upon self and society which accompanies failures or breakdowns in the effort to secure self in social identity. The challenge for critical social theory is to expose the costs associated with the fetishism of identity to reveal how the struggle to change the structure of social relations can contribute a more effective remedy for this condition.

CONCLUSION

This chapter opened by noting a paradox of the labour process debate. The strength of the critical response to *Labor and Monopoly Capital* has demonstrated both the value of the labour process perspective and the pressing need to advance a more adequate theoretical foundation for its development. Yet in the main, the labour process debate has been preoccupied with considerations of the empirical and conceptual accuracy of Braverman's pronouncements on certain issues (for example, deskilling, management strategy) to the neglect of the more fundamental task of theoretical reconstruction.

Focusing upon the work of those who have made major contributions to labour process analysis, from Marx to Burawoy, this chapter has questioned the adequacy of labour process theory for understanding, and transforming, the dialectics of praxis. At one level, the argument has followed the well-beaten path of numerous commentators who have argued that an appreciation of the 'subjective', social construction of capitalist labour processes must be developed to complement and enrich the examination of the 'objective' structures and trajectories of their development. However, if it is accepted that the basic problem with Bravermanian analysis 'lies not only in the dislocation of the "subjective" from the "objective" but also in the very distinction itself' (Burawoy, 1985: 24), then it is the nature of subject-object relations that we must rethink. This rethinking, it has

been suggested, requires much more than an accommodation of the subjective dimensions of production within an object-centred form of analysis. More specifically, it requires a theory of the labour process which is informed by an appreciation of how the constitution of subjectivity, as labour power, is both a condition and a consequence of the reproduction of monopoly capitalism.

Lacking a materialist theory of subjectivity, labour process analysts, from Marx to Burawoy, have failed to explore how the response of the subject to the object, to use Marx's terminology, is informed by the contradictory relation to nature. It has been argued that the dualism within labour process theory between the objective structures of forces of capitalism and the subjective voluntaristic actions of labour cannot be overcome without developing an appreciation of the dialectical relationship between what have been termed the 'existential' and 'historical' dimensions of praxis. This incorporates an appreciation of how human beings become trapped within a fetishised form of self-consciousness in response to anxieties aroused by the experience of separation from nature and massively amplified by the individualising of subjectivity within the capitalist mode of production.

If a materialist analysis of social relations is to remain (or become?) a guiding light for labour process analysis, it must be informed by the practical, critical intent of revealing how the individualising tendencies of capitalist relations of production can accentuate existential insecurity to a point where privatised efforts to gain a secure identity take precedence over collective efforts to transform the historical conditions that promote such self-defeating tendencies. Not that the analysis and removal of 'existential' suffering should be privileged over, or displace, the analysis and transformation of 'historical' conditions which sustain socially unnecessary suffering. Rather, the proposal has been to revitalise labour process theory through an appreciation of the interpenetration of the historical and existential dimensions of the dialectics of praxis so that this suffering may be identified and reduced, not mystified and increased.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Jim McGoldrick, John Storey and David Knights for their comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. Many of the core ideas of the chapter have emerged from a joint theoretical project with David Knights that has evolved over a number of years (Knights and

Willmott, 1976, 1982, 1982a, 1983, 1985, forthcoming). The chapter was initially prompted by comments made by Paul Thompson during the concluding plenary session at the 2nd UMIST–Aston Labour Process Conference. The drift of his remarks placed in question the substance and coherence of ‘dialectical’ approaches to labour process analysis (Thompson, in this volume).

2. The signifier ‘existential’ does not float free of a chain of problematic associations! In some senses, the terms ‘psychoanalytical’ or ‘depth psychological’ would be more defensible. The difficulty with all these terms, however, is that they have been forged within traditions that assume an ahistorical bourgeois conception of subjectivity. For this reason, the stress upon the interdependence and intertwining of subjectivity should be firmly held in mind. An important contribution of Marxian dialectics resides in its critique of this (social Cartesian) tradition. On the other hand, Marx can be criticised especially in his mature writings, for taking for granted and for failing to reflect critically upon the significance of wo/man’s open, contradictory existence – the ‘existential’ dimension of human being which is articulated in, and through, the historical media of social practices.
3. Smacking somewhat of hyperbole (cf. Gintis, 1976; Mackenzie, 1977, Cressey and MacInnes, 1980), Storey (1983: 6) claims that ‘no one has brought these disparate criticisms [of Braverman] together in order to allow a new stage for theoretical advance’. Most contributors to the labour process debate have concentrated upon challenging key elements of Braverman’s thesis (see the introduction to this volume) and/or have sought to apply a more or less reconstructed version of ‘Bravermania’ to the study of particular empirical cases. In general, students of the labour process divide into ‘theorists’ who have set about the demolition of central tenets of *Labor and Monopoly Capital* without making much of a contribution to the fundamental reconstruction of labour process theory or to the empirical or historical study of labour processes, and ‘empiricists’ who sometimes appear only dimly aware of, and are invariably parasitic upon, the (precarious) theoretical foundations of labour process analysis.
4. Certainly, Braverman concentrates upon the ‘universal’ tendential movement in the direction of the deskilling of work through Taylorian methods of work organisation to the relative neglect of ‘local counter-currents that continuously interrupt or reverse this process. However, it is mischievous to cite the one-sidedness of Braverman’s deskilling thesis in support of the erroneous claim that his analysis proceeds in ignorance of the contradictions inherent within control structures and strategies. Braverman’s argument is that capital (management) pursues strategies of control which are *perceived* to be viable in securing the general objective of accumulation. He has no illusions that, with hindsight, such initiatives might be found ill-judged, or that the pursuit of a given strategy might generate unforeseen and often undesired consequences for management. Or, as he puts it, the ideal of total control over minds as well as hands ‘towards which management *tends* is an ideal realised by capital *only within definite limits*, and unevenly among industries’ (Braverman, 1974: 171–2; emphasis added; see also Wardell, this volume).

5. Because Braverman formally excludes analysis of the 'subjective' dimension of production relations from his study, it is true that working-class struggle tends to be 'accorded the status of a merely transient or frictional reaction to capital, rather than being located as the articulation of contradictions within forms of valorization dominating a specific period of capital accumulation' (Elger, 1982: 47). However, when making this criticism it is also necessary to recall the rationale of his project. Wishing to counter bourgeois analyses of labour in which class is reduced to its 'subjective manifestations' Braverman's (1974: 27) concern was to provide an objective ('scientific') map of 'the working class as it exists' so that the likely 'agency of social change' might more accurately be identified. That is why detailed consideration of how these 'objective' conditions are produced and transformed through the purposive actions and struggles of subjects is excluded. To be clear, it is not that Braverman is unaware of the socially constructed nature of class relations. For, as he puts it, 'it is only through consciousness that a class becomes an actor on the historical stage' (ibid.: 29). Nor can it be said that Braverman's conception of class-consciousness is restricted to the revolutionary consciousness of 'class-for-itself', since it encompasses the 'dynamic complex of moods and sentiments affected by circumstances . . . [which] . . . may be weak, confused and subject to manipulation by other classes' (ibid.: 29–30). My criticism of Braverman is not that he was ignorant or dismissive of the social construction of reality, as Storey suggests, but that he founds his limited analysis of the 'subjective' dimension upon an essentialist conception of human nature.
6. When it does make a fleeting appearance (e.g. Storey, 1983: 176, 178), the importance of theory for praxis is disregarded. Storey is not alone in this respect! For example, in Littler and Salaman's (1982) influential review there is little hint of the radical, practical grounding of Braverman's analysis. In the abstract of Littler and Salaman's article, reference is made to impediments to the further development of labour process analysis that are traced to the neglect by Braverman and his followers of 'crucial Marxian categories' and also 'to weaknesses and ambiguities inherent in Marxian theory' (Littler and Salaman, 1982: 251). However, although allusions to these deficiencies are made, the systematic examination and reconstruction of the theoretical underpinnings of labour process analysis fails to materialise. In effect, their discussion is limited to reasserting the case for researching control in relation to compromise as well as conflict (ibid.: 253; Burawoy, 1979; Cressey and MacInnes, 1980) in *isolation* from a critical exploration of the capacity of Marxian theory to appreciate this insight. In the conclusion to their article, Littler and Salaman effectively retreat from the development of 'grand theory' by proposing that work in this area should take the form of 'sociological classification of industries and periodisations of change' (ibid.: 271).
7. Accordingly, Marx (1975: 359) describes some appetites as 'inhuman, unnatural and imaginary'. In the second of the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* he observes that capitalist factory production not only produces 'man in the form of *commodity*'; it also produces him as a *mentally* and physically *dehumanised* being' (ibid.: 336) – dehumanised in the sense that the richness of the historically constituted human senses,

- both tactile and spiritual, is uncultivated and therefore subjectively unappreciated.
8. Since alienated labour and private property are already understood as a cause and a consequence of each other, it is concluded that 'The supersession of private property is therefore the complete emancipation of all human senses and attributes; but it is this emancipation precisely because these senses and attributes have become human, subjectively as well as objectively' (Marx, 1975: 352).
 9. Of particular significance for the argument of the present chapter, it clearly informs Marx's analysis of the labour process in the first volume of *Capital* where he writes 'We presuppose labour in a form in which it is an exclusively human characteristic . . . what distinguishes the worst architect from the best of bees is that the architect builds the cell in his mind before he constructs it in wax' (1976: 283-4). A number of influential commentators, most notably Althusser (1969), have interpreted the younger Marx's references to human nature as an immature, humanist formulation which is expelled from his later, scientific writings. For example, Althusser (1969) cites Marx's sixth thesis on Feuerbach in support of this claim: 'the human essence is no abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality it is the ensemble of the social relations' (Marx, 1975: 423). Against Althusser, it is certainly arguable that in *Capital* Marx retains the earlier philosophical anthropology, though this is both contextualised and *marginalised* by a commitment to treat individuals 'only in so far as they are the personifications of economic categories' (Marx, 1976: 92).
 10. For example, the very logic of the capitalist mode of production is assumed to drive capitalists or their agents (e.g. managers) to maximise the exploitation of labour. Or, as Marx (1976: 449) puts it, the 'determining force of capitalist production is the self-valorisation of capital to the greatest possible extent, i.e. the greatest possible production of surplus-value, hence the greatest possible exploitation of labour-power by the capitalist' (ibid.: 449). Similarly, the assumption of a relentless drive to exploit labour to the maximum extent underwrites the prediction that workers will be driven to negate the negation through 'co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production produced by labour itself' (ibid.: 929). The expropriation of the expropriators is understood to be a historical inevitability because the antagonistic relations between capital and labour are assumed to offer little or no scope for compromise and accommodation (cf. Johnson, 1980). So total is Marx's analytical commitment to the idea that the individual is nothing but the product of the social relations in which s/he is constituted that he tends to marginalise other affiliations and dynamics that are implicated in the relations of production (e.g. sexual, familial, ethnic, educational, etc.). Relatedly, and of even greater importance for the argument of this chapter, his analysis minimises the significance of human beings' contradictory relation to nature.
 11. On the one hand, the openness of human subjectivity, which arises from our contradictory relation to nature, leads us to seek security in those social identities that are both available and valued in society. In this

respect, our species-being exerts a highly conservative effect – an effect that is reinforced and exploited by those whose identity is most strongly invested in whatever advantages are bestowed by their particular positioning within society. At work and in leisure, we are continuously encouraged and rewarded for seeking recognition as certain types of valued social identity. On the other hand, precisely because our subjectivity is open, any solidified sense of identity is vulnerable to disconfirmation. Such disconfirmations may of course stimulate a defensive reaction (e.g. the direct negation of the disconfirmation, the feigning of indifference or the immediate search for a less vulnerable identity), in which case the opportunity for critical reflection upon identity fetishism is missed. But the disappointment of disconfirmation may also facilitate an expansion of awareness beyond the existing confines of ‘the self’ and eventually produce a (socially mediated) realisation of its inescapably conventional nature. In this case, the open quality of human nature may contribute to exerting radical, emancipatory effects upon the reproduction of capitalist society. Thus, in common with commodity fetishism, the fetishism of identity contains within it the possibility of disconfirmation and emancipation. Precisely because it is based upon an illusory solidification of subjectivity, in the sense that it cannot possibly reflect with the complexity or the dynamics of human experience, it too can be exposed and transcended. Here, self-consciousness is grasped as a social characteristic of human labour, not as an objective or socio-natural property of this labour (cf. Marx, 1976: 164 ff.).

12. Very rarely does Marx acknowledge the ambiguity of human need – as for example, when he observes that ‘every real or potential need is a weakness which will tempt the fly on to the lime twig’ (Marx, 1975: 359). His romantic view is reflected in *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, as Cutler (1978) points out.
13. Burawoy (1979) connects the opportunities for outmanoeuvring the system to the changed conditions of production that have followed successful working-class struggles to decouple wages from the individual’s expenditure of effort. Once this link is severed, capital is obliged to supplement the coercion of labour with the manufacture of consent: despotic regimes of coercion are replaced by ‘a hegemonic ideology of corporate liberalism’ (ibid.: 191) where exploitative relations of production are obscured by participation in the game of ‘making-out’. Echoing Braverman, he argues that these designs ‘allow the degradation of work to pursue its course without continuing crisis’ (ibid.: 94).
14. A central argument of *Manufacturing Consent* is ‘that the translation of labor power into labor is conducted independently of the psychic makeup – character or consciousness – that workers bring with them to the shop floor’ (Burawoy, 1979: 201). As critics of Burawoy (e.g. Thompson, 1983) have contended – and as Burawoy himself has partially conceded by dropping his ideas on ‘the internal state’ and his incorporation of a sketchy, functionalistic theory of the state in his description of the hegemonic factory regimes of advanced capitalism (Burawoy, 1985: ch. 3; 1981) – this thesis overstates the separation between intra-work and extra-work experience in the minds of the

worker, such as the expectations about work and organisation that are assimilated at school or in the home (cf. Willis, 1977). However, this criticism completely fails to grasp the basic inadequacies of Burawoy's theory of the subject.

15. Other, less penetrating efforts to advance a 'Marxist psychology' have been made by Seve (1978) and Leonard (1984). More promising lines of development have been forged by Foucault (1982) and D'Amico (1978). Lichtman (1982) provides the fullest exploration of the interpenetration of the historical and existential dimensions of social existence. However, he omits the important contributions of post-structuralist analyses (e.g. Baudrillard, 1981; Deleuze and Guattari, 1984) and is inclined to cling to a romantic conception of the subject which has fallen victim to false consciousness. Although he has not integrated his analysis with an appreciation of the historical conditioning of subjectivity, a most penetrating critique of psychoanalysis, which I believe must parallel the critique of historical materialism, can be found in Levin (1981).

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Index

- abstract category of labour 284–92
 - integration and 292–4
- accounting 167
- administration 157, 166–7, 249
 - see also* management
- Adorno, T. 287
- Affluent Worker studies 33, 275
- alienation 40, 345, 354
- Althusser, L. 16
- analytical integration 293
- anthracite industry 169
- Armstrong, P. 52, 71, 258
 - on skills 137, 149; skills and gender 249, 250–1
- Aronowitz, S. 299
- assertion of identity 317–18
- autonomy
 - relative 100, 130–4
 - see also* Responsible Autonomy
- Baldamus, W. 140–1
- bankruptcy 236
- Bannon, E. 101–2
- Baran, P. 210, 282
- batch production 51
- Beechey, V. 245, 246, 264
- behaviourism 331
- Bell, M. 83
- Bennett, L. 251
- Berger, P. L. 343
- Bessant, J. 86
- Blackburn, R. M. 137
- bottlenecks 84
- boundaries of analysis 110–14
- Braverman, H. 1, 76, 78, 131, 153
 - capital's domination of labour 302, 343
 - class 9–10, 41–2, 115
 - control 20, 48–9, 55–6, 64
 - deskilling 7–8, 41, 137, 300, 342
 - dialectical analysis 25–7, 171
 - exclusion of subjectivity 15–16, 114, 337, 340, 372–3
 - history 168
 - human nature 299
 - Labor and Monopoly Capital* 7–10; critiques 10–19, 172, 277–9, 282, 297–8; influence 33
 - labour power 161–2
 - management 4, 7, 57
 - Model T Ford 40
 - new approach 47, 274, 275–7
 - romanticisation of craft work 300–1
 - state 8–9, 29, 209–10, 213–14, 215
 - two-dimensional approach 154–8
 - view of the firm 56
- Brighton Labour Process Group 100, 111
- British Institute of Management survey 51–2
- Burawoy, M. 2, 29, 111
 - capital–labour relations 15–19, 100
 - conflict 198
 - consent 70, 113–14, 140, 141, 149, 363–4
 - control 62–5; management attitudes 185
 - factory regimes 87, 129; hegemonic despotism 43, 62, 98
 - functionalism 106
 - games 17, 35, 42, 364
 - politics 22, 117–19
 - state 110; internal 213, 216–19
 - subjectivity 70, 157–8, 309–13, 363–5; Braverman's exclusion 15–16, 337
- bureaucratic control 60–1
- Byrne, D. 117
- capital
 - centralisation 159, 169
 - contradictory relation to labour 65, 136, 185–6, 305–6, 361–2
 - fractions of 212, 227–30, 235–9
 - full circuit of 13–15, 21, 103, 108, 111, 131
 - capital-intensive production 250–1, 252
- capitalism 2–3, 128
 - alienation 353–4
 - contradictions of 135–6, 341, 342, 344, 348

- Capitalism (*cont'd*)
 control 136–8; and resistance 158–60
 development 4–7, 76, 302–3; control and 60–3
 exploitation 348–50
 gender and 268–9
 human beings 39
 monopoly 7–10, 213
 production 349; separation from labour process 156, 161, 162–3
 state and 213
 car industry 203–4
 Castells, M. 135
 centralisation of capital 159, 169
 centrality of labour management 53, 54
 Chandler, A. D. 73
 change
 engineering model 84
 paths of 82
 Changsha, China 66–7
 Child, J. 52, 105–6, 182, 183
 choices 364–5
 class 113
 Braverman's exclusion of the subjective 9–10, 15–16, 41–2
 gender and 32, 268, 313, 318, 327; compensatory theories 316–17; control and tenure 257–9, 270; patriarchy 246–7
 relations 15–19, 215
 class struggle 115–17, 119–20
 Lawson, D. 2
 cleaning industry 264, 266
 Clegg, S. 120–1
 clerical work 249–50
 closed shop 240–1
 clothing industry 265
 coal-mining industry 163–4, 170
 Cockburn, C. 35, 245, 247, 254–61, 268
 on class and gender 257–9, 313–17, 327
 Cohen G. A. 138, 342
 collective worker 5, 40
 Collinson, D. 65–6, 114
 commodification of labour 164
 communication among workers 196
 compensatory theories 315–17
 competition 21
 compliance 71, 140–1
 computer departments 190–4, 195, 198, 201–2, 204
 conceptual integration 293
 Confederation of British Industry (CBI) 228–9, 235–6
 conflict 22, 198
 co-operation and 101–2
 structured antagonism 23, 128, 139–40
 work organisation 104, 105
 see also struggle
 conscious life activity 346, 348, 351
 consciousness, managerial 182–3
 consent 70, 101–2, 113–14, 223
 compliance and 140–1
 manufacture 364, 375
 Conservative governments 31, 233, 234, 237, 238
 consumption 355
 contract labour 67
 contradictions 135–6
 in capital–labour relations 65, 185–6, 305–6, 361–2
 of capitalism 135–6, 341, 342, 344, 348
 within the labour process 136
 control 21, 206
 analysis 109–10
 autonomy of labour process 130–2
 capitalism and 136–8
 conflict and 23–4
 imperative 100–1, 105
 managerial strategy 20, 48–50, 55–63, 97–8, 104; aims and 181–2
 relationship 63–77
 resistance and 144, 158–60, 166, 169–70, 171, 305
 structure 80, 187, 189, 193–4, 203
 struggle and 142–7
 subjectivity 304–5, 307–8
 Coombs, R. 81–4, 85, 95, 103, 108
 on conflict 104, 105
 co-operation 101–2
 core of labour process theory 21, 99–102
 corporations 53
 corporatism 30, 239
 British 31, 227–9, 231–2, 237–8
 populism and 220–6
 Courtaulds 269
 Cousins, M. 323–4
 Coyle, A. 264, 266
 craft control 48, 49
 craft work, romantic conception of 300, 301
 Craib, I. 283
 Cressey, P. 102, 136, 305–9, 361–3

- Crompton, R. 50
 CSS Report 74–5
 Cunnison, S. 133
- Davies, C. 249, 253–4
 dehumanised subjectivity 39, 346–8
 democracy, industrial 121
 ‘Democracy in the Trade Unions’ 234
 design space 86
 deskilling 8, 10–12, 96–7, 300, 342, 372
 despotic regime 18, 62, 117
 see also hegemonic despotism
 detailed control 24, 138, 142–5
 determinism 304
 dialectical approach 98–9, 127, 148, 293
 Braverman’s legacy 26–7, 153,
 162–6, 171
- dialectics
 appeal of 339–45
 failure of 304–9
 of labour 287–8
 materialist 345–52
 of praxis 352–8
 of production 166–70
- Direct Control 28, 57–8, 178–9, 184, 359
 computer programming 194
 lateral relations 197
 managers’ attitudes 185
 market conditions 203
 simple 59, 60–1
 task organisation 29, 183
- discretion, worker 56–7, 192
 disorder 146
 divisions among workers 196–7
 domination 134–42
 see also subordination
- Dow, G. *et al.* 112
 downward mobility 265, 270
 Du Boff, R. B. 73
 dualism 303–9
- Edwards, P. K. 61, 110, 112
 on workplace relations 75, 99, 100,
 131, 132
- Edwards, R.
 centralisation of capital 169
 control, 12, 56, 203; capitalist
 development 59–61, 63, 97;
 resistance and 158–61, 171–2
 politics 115–116
 efficiency 54–5, 72, 73–6
 Ehrenreich, B. and J. 116
- electrical engineering industry 14
 electronics industry 252
 Elger, T. 215
 emancipation 280, 347, 348, 351
 Emmett, I. 133
 empiricism 278
 Employment Acts 233–4
 employment growth 261–2
 Employment Protection Act 228
 employment relationship 80–1
 employment security 65–7, 195–6
 Engels, F. 4
 engineering model of change 84, 86
 essentialism 120–1
 estrangement 40, 345, 354
 ethnic-minority labour 268–9
 Etzioni, A. 68
 exhaustion of corporatism 232
 exploitation 6–7, 40, 99–100, 138–40
 subjectivity 348–51, 374
 expressive totality 287
 external state 210, 213–16
- factory regimes 42, 117–18, 218, 219
 formality 129, 149
 see also despotic regime; hegemonic
 despotism; hegemonic regime
- falsification 278
 family 265
 Fantasia, R. 2
 Faulkner, R. R. 198
 feminism 112, 245–8
 fetishism of identity 355–6, 369, 375
 financial capital 229–30, 236
 Flanders, A. 146
 Ford motor company 40, 142–3
 Foucault, M. 34, 288, 331
 subjectivity and power 35–6,
 318–29, 355
- Fox, A. 56, 127, 146
 fractions of capital 212
 industrial relations 227–30
 populism 235–9
 fragmentation 274–94
 abstract category of labour 284–94
 Bravermania 275–9
 Modernism 279–83
 as unifier 283–4
- Frankfurt School 70, 287–8
 freedom
 independence and 353–4, 359–60
 power and 319, 324–6, 330

- Friedman, A. 12, 64, 97
 managerial strategies 56, 57–9, 106;
 subjectivity of labour 359–61
- Fromm, E. 322
- frontiers of control 129–30, 143–4, 149
- full circuit of capital 13–15, 21, 103,
 108, 111, 131
- functionalism 106
- Gamble, A. 286
- Game, A. 254
- game-playing 17, 35, 42, 314
 choice and 364, 365
 coal-miners 170
 self-organisation 309–10
- Geller, J. 142
- gender 134, 244–69
 class and *see* class
 feminism 245–8
 identities 35, 312–18, 327, 366–7
 skill and 244–5, 248–53, 254–7, 260,
 267
 women's work and restructuring
 261–6
- gendered work 32, 253–61
- general control 24, 138, 145–7
- Germany, Federal Republic of 50
- Giddens, A. 360
- global state 217
- Glucksmann, M. 252, 263
- Goldthorpe, J. H. 47, 146
- Gordon, D. 75–6, 158, 169
- Gorz, A. 116–17
- Gouldner, A. 144.
- Gramsci, A. 16
- gravedigger thesis 115
- Habermas, J. 279, 280, 287, 288
- Hales, M. 49
- Hartmann, H. 246–7
- Hegel, G. W. F. 345
- hegemonic despotism 42, 62, 98, 118
- hegemonic regime 16–18, 42, 43, 62,
 118–19, 219
- Henriques, *et al* 368
- Herman, E. S. 73
- Higgins, W. 120–1
- high discretion syndrome 56–7
- historiography 278
- history 168–9
- human beings
 prediction of interactions 180
 relation to nature 37–8, 337–8, 360
- human nature
 Braverman and 299, 300–1
 Burawoy and 35, 311, 364
 Foucault and 323–5
 Marx and 299–300, 301, 352–3, 374
- Hussain, A. 323–4
- Hyman, R. 18, 55, 126
- ICI 53
- ideals 366–7
- identity 354, 358, 374–5
 choice and 365
 fetishism of 355–6, 369, 375
 gender and 35, 312–18, 327, 366–7
 individualisation and 321–2, 338
 security and 368–70
- independence 359–60
- individualisation 197–8, 311–12, 338,
 357–8
 subjectivity and 313, 319–20; power
 and 321–3
see also fragmentation
- indulgency pattern 144
- industrial relations 276
 capital and 227–30
 populism and 233–5
- Industrial Relations Act 228, 235, 240
- industrial sociology 47, 275–6
- information technologies (IT) 256–7,
 259
- insecurity 322, 328–9, 367
- integration 283–4, 292–4
- interests 140
- internal relations, philosophy of 302
- internal state 216–19
- internationalisation 236–7
- Japan 50, 53
- Jay, M. 284, 285
- job design 14, 80
- job reform 14–15, 107–8
- job security 65–7, 195–6
- Jones, B. 86, 104, 108, 136, 182
- Jones, G. 50
- Joyce, P. 141
- Kaufman, H. 68
- Kelly, J. 96, 181, 205
 full circuit of capital 13–14, 103,
 130–1
 job design 14, 104, 107, 137
- Knights, D. 109, 114
- Kraft, P. 202

- labour
 abstract category of 34, 284–94
 capital's contradictory relation to
 65, 136, 185–6, 305–6, 361–2
 commodification of 164
 subjectivity of 359–70
 Labour government 231–2
 labour-intensive production 250–1, 252
 labour-market relations 189, 194–6, 204
 labour power
 capacity or potential 160–1
 managerial strategies and 178
 Marx and 353–4, 357
 wage labour and 2–4, 354
 labour process
 contradiction 185–6
 paradigm 48–50
 reconceptualisation 77–86
 relative autonomy 130–4
 labour process theory
 attacked 95, 278–9
 boundaries of analysis 110–14
 impact 275, 277
 questioned 96–110; core 21, 99–102
 Laclau, E. 225
 lateral relations 189, 196–8, 199
 Lazonick, W. H. 132, 141
 leisure 141–2
 Liang, H. 66–7
 liberalism 230
 Liff, S. 252–3
 Littler, C. R. 99, 186, 192, 214–15
 control 17–18, 53, 100, 215; away
 from point of production 130,
 138; non-issue 137, 145
 long-wave theory 85
 low discretion syndrome 56
 Luckmann, T. 343
 Lukács, G. 286–7
 Lupton, T. 131
 Lyotard, J. -F. 33, 277, 279, 280
- MacInnes, J. 87, 102, 136, 305–9, 361–3
 Mackenzie, 340
 Maitland, I. 146
 Malcahy, S. D. 198
 management 82, 109, 310–11, 331
 accounting 167
 activities 186–98
 aims 181–2
 choice 86
 consciousness and rationality 182–3
 control and 7–8, 20, 48–50, 103–4
 deskilling 8
 job reform 107–8
 philosophies 184–5
 realisation of ideal limited 156–7
 management strategies 12–13, 46,
 50–63, 105–6, 177
 Friedman 28–9, 56–9, 177, 178–86;
 and management activities
 186–98, 203–4; subjectivity 359,
 360
 Mandel, E. 291
 Mann, M. 137
 Manwaring, T. 137
 market conditions 203–4
 marketing 41
 Marsden, D. *et al* 54–5
 Marx, K. 1
 abstract category of labour 285–6,
 290, 291
 gravedigger thesis 115
 human nature 299–300, 301, 325,
 374
 labour process theory 2–7, 77–8,
 133; management 181
 structuralism 302–3
 subjectivity 37, 299, 301–2,
 337–8; dialectics 340–1, 345–52;
 praxis 344, 252–8
 Marxism 102, 114, 307
 masculine identity 314, 315
 Master and Servant legislation 81
 materialist dialectics 345–52
 McGregor, D. 56
 Meager, N. 263
 mechanisation, phases of 83–4, 85
 mediation 133
 Melling, J. 79
 Meszaros, I. 286
 meta-narratives 277, 294
 migrant labour 268, 270
 Milkman, R. 252, 253
 mobility, downward 265, 270
 modes of production 127–8, 135
see also capitalism
 Modernism 33, 274–5, 277, 279–83, 293,
 294
 money capital 229–30, 236
 monitoring systems 68–9
 monopoly capital 7–10, 213
 Morgan, D. H. J. 133
 multinational capital 230, 236
- National Association of Accountants
 167

- National Health Service (NHS) 249, 253
nationalism 225
nature, human beings and 7–8, 337–8,
360
negotiation of order 126
Neimark, M. 99
‘New Right’ philosophy 327–8
Nicholas, I. 86
Nicholaus, M. 288
Nichols, T. 71, 78
- objective dimension 331
 Braverman and 9–10, 16, 34–5,
 41–2, 337
 see also subjectivity
observability 68–9
Offe, C. 287
Olivier, L. 200
Ollman, M. 285
operational management 82
order, negotiation of 126
organisation theory 276
organisations, structure of 72–3
originality of task 192–3
‘other’, conceptualisation of 186
Ouchi, W. G. 72
outcomes, strategies and 52
outwork 263
- Palmer, B. 71
Panacea Fallacy 13, 22
part-time work 261–2, 263, 265, 266,
269
paternalism 229
patriarchy 244, 246–7, 267, 268, 269
Pearson, R. 269
petit-bourgeois capital 229, 236, 238
Phillips, A. 247, 248, 250, 268
philosophies, management 184–5
point of production 24–5, 87, 276
politics of production 114–22
Pollert, A. 366
populism 30–1
 capital and 235–9
 corporatism and 220–6
 emergence of 239–42
 industrial relations strategies 233–5
post-Modernism 33, 279–80, 282, 283,
294
Poulantzas, N. 16, 291–2
power 72, 73
 subjectivity and 318–23, 325–7
praxis 27, 37, 155, 344, 345, 373
 dialectics of 352–8
 preconceptualisation 49
 prediction 180
pre-Modernism 33, 279, 282–3
primary mechanisation 83–4
Pringle, R. 254
printing industry 255–6
private property 346, 347, 356, 373
privilege 100
production 133, 155
 capitalism and 156, 161, 162–6, 349
 dialectics of 166–70
 point of 24–5, 87, 276
 politics of 114–22
 process 77; change and 82–3; model
 81–2; technology and 83
 relations of 3–4, 40
productivity 46–7
programming, computer 190–2, 193–4,
195, 198, 204
proletarian revolution *see* revolution
Przeworski, A. 223
purposive action 155, 290
- qualitative efficiency 75–6
quantitative efficiency 75–6
- race 316, 331
radiographers 260
Ramsey, H. 107, 111
rationality, managerial 182–3
reconceptualisation of the labour
 process 20, 77–86
redundancy, fear of 65–6
relations of production 3–4, 40
Reich, M. 158, 169
relative autonomy 100, 130–4
reserve army of labour (RAL) 245–6
resistance 6, 119–20, 204
 control and 144, 158–60, 166,
 169–70, 171, 305
 subjectivity and 323–6, 327–8,
 360–1
Responsible Autonomy 12, 28, 57–58,
178–9, 184
 computer programming 194, 198
 lateral relations 197, 198
 market conditions 203
 subjectivity 359
 task organisation 29, 183
revolution, proletarian 115, 350–1
 failure of the 303–4
Roberts, J. 109
Rose, M. 104, 108, 136, 182
Rosenberg, N. 85
Rosser, J. 249, 253–4

- Salaman, G. 125, 214–15
 control 17–18, 53; away from point of production 130, 138; non-issue 137, 145
- Sayer, A. 98
- scientific management 40, 41
see also Taylorism
- Scullion, H. 131, 132
- secondary mechanisation 84
- secret ballots 234, 235, 241–2
- security 329, 368, 369–70
see also insecurity; job security
- self-consciousness 345
- self-employment 262–3
- self-expression 362–3
- self-organisation 121–2, 161–2, 168–70, 309–11, 318
- sexual activity 290–1
- sexuality 314
- Shapiro, J. 66–7
- 'shop stewards' movement 231
- simple direct control 59, 60–1
- skills, 137–8, 363
 gender and 244–5, 248–53, 254–7, 260, 267
see also deskilling; technology
- sleep 290
- social construction 341, 343–4, 373
- social formations 128–9
- social sciences 281
- socialism 120–2
- societal development 154–5
- Sorge, A. 86
- state 29–31, 209–42
 capital and industrial relations 227–30
 corporatism 220–6, 231–3
 external 210, 213–16
 gender and 265–6
 internal 216–19
 populism 220–6, 233–42
- state socialism 65, 66–7
- steel industry 264
- Storey, J. 61, 64, 126, 372
 control 105, 109–10
 labour process theory 19, 95, 106;
 dialectical approach 98, 341–4
- strategic dilution 29
- strategic management 82
- strategies
see also management strategies
 outcomes and 52
- structural approach 26, 27, 158–62
- structured antagonism 23, 128, 139
- structured programming 191, 202
- struggle 165, 169–70, 358
 control and 24, 129, 142–7
 resistance and transformation 119–20
see also conflict
- subcontract 263
- subjectivity 34–8, 163, 297–329, 331, 336–71
 Braverman 9–10, 155–6, 158, 372–3
 Burawoy 309–13, 318
 Cockburn 313–18
 control and 70–1
 dialectics: appeal 339–45; failure of 304–9; materialist 345–52; of praxis 352–8
 Foucault's approach 318–26
 of labour 359–70
 neglect of the subject 22, 114, 299–304
- subjugation 36, 319
- subordination 134–42, 312, 361–2
- success, managerial 183–4
- surpluses 21
- Sweezy, P. 210, 282
- tacit skills 137–8, 149
- task organisation 189, 190–3
- Taylor, B. 247, 248, 250, 268
- Taylor, F. W. 184, 197
- Taylorism, 8, 40, 59, 276
- Tebbit, N. 235
- technical control 59–60, 60–1, 142–3
- techniques 199–200, 201–2
- technological clustering 85
- technological convergence 85
- technologies of power 320
- technology, 80, 106
 change and 83–6, 87
 gender and 247–8, 256–7, 259–60
 techniques and 199, 200–2
- temporary work 263
- tertiary mechanisation 84
- textual integration 292
- Thatcher, M. H. 220, 235
- Thatcher government 237
- Thompson, P. 79, 102, 131, 274, 278
- Timperley, S. R. 132
- Tinker, T. 99
- Tomlinson, J. 51, 103, 112–13
- totality 34, 284–9, 341, 342–3, 344
- trade unions
 capital and 230, 236, 238
 corporatism and 228, 229, 231–2
 populism and 31, 233–5, 238–9, 240–2

- training 195
- transformation 22–3, 119–20, 160
- Turner, B. 51

- United Kingdom
 - car industry 203–4
 - corporatism 231–2
 - disorder 146
 - economy 281–2
 - labour process debate 46–7
 - political fragmentation 281
 - populism 233–42
 - social sciences 281
- United Mine Workers of America (UMWA) 169
- United States of America
 - anthracite industry 169
 - coal-mining industry 163–4
 - job security 67
 - transformation periods 160

- valorisation 3
- value systems, management 184–5
- Veblen, T. 185
- vertical integration 73
- Vico, G. 285–6
- vulnerability 368

- wage labour 2–4, 354
- Walton, P. 286
- Weber, M. 60
- Westwood, S. 134
- Wilkinson, B. 86, 122
- Williamson, O. 72–3
- Willmott, H. 109
- Wood, S. 130, 137, 181, 205
- Woodward, J. 69, 200
- work design 192
- work orientations 47
- workers' collective action *see* self-organisation
- Wright, E. O. 113, 133, 139