Historical Interpretations of the Labour Process: Retrospect and Future Research Directions

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Labour process research has had a profound impact on the study of work by highlighting the central role of management in controlling labour cost and application. It is also an approach that is strongly grounded in a historical and empirical methodology. This paper reviews the contribution of labour process theory and research over the last forty years to the study of Australian labour and business history. While interest in the labour process from an historical perspective has declined in recent years, this paper identifies four areas where recent research may offer conceptual inspiration, specifically: questions of managerial and professional identity; organisational change and management innovation; the nature and control of service work; and globalisation and comparative labour process analysis.

Labour process research grew dramatically in popularity during the 1970s and 1980s, fundamentally reshaping debates in sociology, industrial relations, organisational behaviour, and business and management studies. Importantly, the study of the labour process has always involved a strong historical and empirical tradition, with researchers grounding their theoretical contributions within a detailed analysis of how employer strategies, technologies and employee skills have evolved over time. Rather than viewing work simply as a feature of contemporary social relations, labour process theorists highlighted the ways in which modern work organisation is the product of a rich history of contestation and conflict; reflecting the basic features of the capitalist economic system. As a result, labour process researchers have provided an excellent demonstration of how historical research can help to make sense of contemporary phenomena, as well as contribute to broader political agendas such as the advocacy for new and better forms of work organisation.[1]

Since the 1990s, however, academic research into the labour process, and employer control strategies more generally, has declined in popularity as new academic fashions have arisen. For instance, the rise of post-structuralism in critical management studies and the so-called 'discursive turn' in the social sciences more generally, have led many to dismiss labour process analysis as 'essentialist' and reliant on a crude Marxist interpretation of economic power and worker subjectivity. For many commentators, labour process theory and related research is seen as having run its course and having little to contribute in terms of new conceptual insights. Indeed, during the 1990s it was common to read of labour process theory in a state of 'crisis', 'wreckage' and 'disarray'.[2]

In this paper I review the contribution of labour process theory and research over the last forty years to the study of Australian labour and business history. After outlining the key components of labour process theory and its principal contributors, the paper explores key themes in the Australian literature on the labour process and managerial strategy, including: the rationalisation of work and deskilling; the role of scientific management and Taylorism; alternative forms of labour management strategy; and variations in employee responses and labour resistance. Australian

studies of the labour process exhibit both commonalities and variations with North American and European experience reflecting differences in industrial regulation, trade union organisation and industry structure. Despite the decline in academic popularity for labour process analysis, I argue that there is still significant potential for further historical work in a labour process tradition which draws on new and emerging themes from the broader social sciences. Focusing on recent developments in workplace sociology and organisational studies, I outline a number of conceptual themes which offer significant potential for future historical research.

The Labour Process in Historical Perspective

The central feature of labour process analysis is the examination of how employers have sought to control employees at work in order to maximise productive work effort. Implicit within this analysis is an interpretation of the capitalist employment relationship as inherently open-ended, in that while employers hire workers for a wage, the amount of productive labour actually expended by employees will vary. Labour process theorists stress how unlike other components of the production process, labour is composed of people with their own aspirations and needs, and who retain the power to resist treatment as a simple market commodity. Labour process writers therefore argue that management develops strategies or practices in order to better control the transformation of the workforce's potential to work (labour power) into actual work effort (productive labour).[3]

Labour process theory emerged as a distinct approach to the study of capitalist work relations from the mid-1970s following the publication of Braverman's seminal work *Labor and Monopoly Capital*. Based on Marx's original interpretation of the history of capitalism, Braverman sought to update and extend Marx's original analysis to account for developments in the 'monopoly phase' of capitalism during the twentieth century. Unlike the nineteenth century phase of competitive capitalism, Braverman argued the transition to monopoly capitalism and the market dominance of large, coordinated corporations resulted in the real subordination of labour through a far more detailed control of work. He argued that employers, in seeking to gain greater control over the labour process, had separated the conception of work from its execution. This had led to deskilling, job fragmentation, and the transformation of work from the craft system to modern forms of labour control based upon techniques of scientific management and mechanisation.[4]

Braverman's analysis proved profoundly influential in understanding changes in the nature of capitalist work. First it emerged at a time of significant social and industrial unrest. Large-scale industrial stoppages during the later 1960s by factory workers protesting against dehumanised assembly-line work and attempts at work reorganisation, gave his book an immediate relevance to the key social changes of the time.[5] Braverman's focus on the workplace also fitted with the 'bottom-up' perspective of the 'new social history' which also stressed the emergence of the working class and industrial rationalisation.[6] Most importantly though, Braverman's analysis transcended the traditional academic boundaries that existed in understanding the organisation of work. Up until this time, the study of management and its relationship to labour at the workplace had been fragmented between a variety of academic disciplines. For example, a broad body of industrial sociology had explored the changing nature of occupations and provided ethnographies of

industrial work. Sociologists such as Bendix, and later industrial relations writers such as Fox, had also highlighted the historical development of management ideology.[7] From a different perspective, management writers such as Woodward and McGregor, and business historians such as Chandler, had examined the nature and development of management organisation, structure and style.[8] However, as Littler highlighted, Braverman's book differed from these works by linking themes that had previously been viewed as unrelated and providing the potential 'for the birth of a new, integrated approach to the study and history of work'.[9]

During the later 1970s and early 1980s, debate over the development of the labour process led to a growing body of theoretical and empirical literature. Several writers criticised Braverman's determinism, in particular, his assumption that capitalism developed in a predetermined fashion according to its own internal logic. They argued that more detailed historical analysis revealed capitalism's uneven and contradictory development, and that Braverman's broad sweep methodology ignored such historical complexity. Far from the depiction of managers as omnipotent and all-knowing, critics argued the rationalisation of the labour process could itself generate new control problems. Further, divisions within management, as well as employee and trade union resistance, could result in opposition to the introduction of new control techniques.[10] Many also questioned Braverman's emphasis upon scientific management as the central feature underlying the capitalist labour process. Edwards and Littler for instance, argued that Braverman confused the claims of scientific management's advocates with the reality of shopfloor practice, which they viewed as a failed experiment.[11] For others, such as Thompson, the institutionalisation of scientific management within job design made it 'an essential and defining feature of the capitalist labour process',[12] although he acknowledged the pattern of its implementation, the variety of its forms, and additional or alternative strategies of control also needed to be highlighted.

Following criticism of Braverman's work, discussion shifted from an analysis of a single dynamic of deskilling, to consideration of a variety of management techniques, and the factors under which management pursued certain strategies. Edwards for example, in his book *Contested Terrain*, argued the labour process in American industry had developed progressively from simple direct controls to more indirect forms. Unlike Braverman, he argued that worker resistance was the major reason underlying changes in the means of control. For example, he claimed that during the competitive period of capitalist development, entrepreneurs relied upon personal control of their workforce. As firm size increased, employers delegated responsibility to foremen and supervisors. However, the harsh and arbitrary manner in which foremen dealt with workers led to labour disputes, and eventually forced managers to experiment with new techniques such as welfarism, scientific management, and company unionism. With the failure of these techniques by the 1930s, Edwards argued managers adopted more indirect control strategies determined by the structural features of work. These included 'technical control', where the pace and content of work was controlled through the design of production technology. While technical control through innovations such as the assembly line ensured output, they also unified workers and increased their ability to slow and even stop production. In response to such organised resistance, Edwards argued management increasingly shifted towards 'bureaucratic control', in which the regulation of worker behaviour

was achieved through the formulation of work rules, job categories, wage scales, and disciplinary procedures.[13]

Another model of labour process development was presented by Burawoy, who explored both the role of the state as well as the ways in which employees often consented to management's workplace authority. Burawoy identified three periods of labour process development, which he termed 'despotic', 'hegemonic', and 'hegemonic despotism'. Despotism, he argued, was a common feature of nineteenth century competitive capitalism, where employers through mechanisation and the subdivision of jobs undermined workers' bargaining power and maintained discipline through the threat of dismissal. With the shift to monopoly capitalism, Burawoy argued the decline in competitive pressure as well as an increase in state intervention limited the application of despotic forms of control. Within this hegemonic period, the state by providing welfare benefits and legislative recognition of trade unions, forced employers to adopt practices aimed at gaining worker consent. This was achieved by management establishing rules governing production. Burawoy argued the last and most recent phase, hegemonic despotism, resulted from the internationalisation of capitalism, in which labour made concessions to management in order to prevent capital from moving overseas.[14]

While Edwards and Burawoy's work broadened the analysis of the labour process and management control, their work was also a source of further criticism resulting in more fine-grained historical analysis. For example, while the concept of management strategy implied omnipotence and rationality, detailed historical studies of specific companies and industries highlighted the often ad hoc nature of management action and the lack of long-term vision.[15] Indeed, far from a common model of employer strategy, detailed historical analysis revealed significant industry and company variation. For example, studies of the emergence of personnel management in American industry during the 1920s and 1930s, not only highlighted the important role of government and professional associations in promoting more bureaucratic employment practice, but also significant variation between firms and industries.[16]

Moreover, labour strategies might involve combinations of practices at a variety of levels which could prove complementary but also contradictory. For instance Gospel, in his analysis of the history of British employer practice distinguished between labour management practices at three levels. First, what he termed 'employment relations' which included the recruitment, selection, training, and reward of employees. Second, 'work relations', that is, how management chooses to organise the technical and social features of work. Third, 'industrial relations', which referred to the management of trade unions and the nature of collective bargaining. While management might adopt a particular practice, its effect could well vary depending on which level of labour management is examined. Hence, as Littler demonstrated of British industry, while scientific management resulted in the bureaucratisation of work relations (job design and the structures of shopfloor control), such practices had little impact upon employment relations.[17]

Appreciation of the complex and contingent nature of the labour process was highlighted particularly in a number of cross-national comparative historical studies. Although labour process analysis has tended to remain a largely Anglophone phenomenon, studies such as Littler's comparative analysis of labour process

developments in the United States, United Kingdom and Japan highlighted the importance of different institutional arrangements in varying national paths of labour process development. These included the varying role of government and trade unions, as well as different sources of management knowledge transmission, such as multinational companies and early management consultancies. These themes of cross-national variation were also developed in other studies and edited collections which highlighted the complex and contingent path of employer control in a broadening range of country settings.[18]

Australian Research on the History of the Labour Process

In comparison to the rapid interest in the labour process amongst US and UK researchers during the later 1970s and 1980s, Australian studies of the labour process were slower to develop. Unlike America and Britain, Australia lacked an industrial sociology tradition of workplace-level research with the study of industrial relations dominated by a preoccupation with the formal institutions of industrial arbitration, trade unions and employer associations. Moreover, while labour historians had made significant contributions to the study of the working class and labour movement, issues of work organisation and management practice were often viewed as contextual factors and remained largely neglected.[19]

This began to change during the mid to late 1980s as Australian researchers from a variety of backgrounds began to focus on the issue of work organisation from an historical perspective and seek to empirically test the local application of labour process theory. Among the first to broach this question were Connell and Irving, who in their 1980 historical examination of class in Australia highlighted the scarcity of existing empirical investigations of work organisation and managerial strategy. In response, a number of writers sought to fill this gap. Game and Pringle's 1983 book *Gender at Work*, while not explicitly historical, focused on the gender division of labour and highlighted the traditional role of sectors such as banking and insurance as key locations of 'women's work'. Cochrane's 1985 article in *Labour History* provided an insightful overview of the changing nature of management control during the post-World War II period. Based on an examination of management journals from the 1940s and 1950s, he emphasised the professionalisation of management in Australia and growing employer interest in scientific management, personnel practices and mechanisation. He argued that the changed economic context of the post-war boom and full employment was a major impetus for employers to explore new means of labour engagement and control.[20] Other examples of a growing interest in labour process concerns included Shields' examination of the impact of arbitration court decisions on employee skills and apprenticeship in the metal trades in the inter-war period, and Nyland's study of the role of the federal arbitration court in legitimating scientific management ideas after the First World War.[21]

A range of industry-specific studies also emerged with an explicit focus on issues of control, the labour process and management strategy. A prime example was Frances' research into the clothing and boot trades during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which stressed changing systems of management control, the use of new technologies, deskilling and the gender division of labour. Other important contributions included: Willis' examination of the chain system in the meat industry; Reekie's study of the use of welfarism by the large department stores in the 1920s;

Patmore's analysis of bureaucratic control and systematic management practices in the NSW Railways; and studies by Wright and Quinlan of management's labour strategies in the early Australian steel industry.[22] In all of these cases, researchers focused on different types of employer strategies, finding distinctive patterns of practice in very different industry settings.

However, despite this growing body of research, as Dunford stressed in a 1988 discussion paper, the historical development of Australian labour management practice and labour process changes remained largely undocumented.[23] While studies such as Cochrane's attempted to draw a general picture, they lacked the empirical detail of workplace analysis. In contrast, industry studies provided a more detailed examination although they were limited in scope and lacking any comparative dimension. As a result, not only were significant areas of industry yet to be examined, but an integrated analysis was also lacking. This was important as overseas research had highlighted not only the variety of labour strategies used by employers, but also significant variation between sectors and firms, suggesting a complex explanation for how and why employers managed their workforce in particular contexts. In Britain for example, changes in work organisation and labour management practice during the inter-war period were most pronounced in new mass production industries, such as chemical, automobile, electrical appliance and consumer products manufacture. This contrasted with traditional industries where labour process changes were introduced in a more piecemeal fashion. A similar pattern of the variable adoption of new labour practices such as scientific and personnel management was also evident in the USA, where workplace and business historians pointed to a range of intra-firm and exogenous factors (for example, state legislation, professionalisation) for differences in managerial approaches.[24]

During the 1990s, Australian research on workplace industrial relations, the labour process and managerial strategy grew dramatically, influenced by public policy interest in workplace industrial relations and microeconomic reform. While this resulted in an increasing number of contemporary studies of different industries and companies and their employment practices,[25] these issues were also explored from an historical perspective, adding significantly to earlier research on the topic. Indicative of this trend was a chapter devoted to the labour process in Patmore's 1991 text *Australian Labour History*; Frances' 1993 monograph *The Politics of Work*, which brought together her earlier work on the clothing industry with additional case studies of the footwear and printing industries;, and Wright's 1995 book *The Management of Labour*, which explored the history of Australian labour management practice throughout the twentieth century.[26]

These studies not only documented the empirical detail of workplace history, including an explicit acknowledgement of multiple management control strategies, but also sought to use broader theories of management practice (including labour process theory) to better explain why particular strategies were used by employers and the contingent factors underlying variations in practice. For example, Wright's study used a combination of labour process and strategic choice theory. Building on the work of Gospel, he explored how Australian employers had sought to increase labour productivity and reduce labour cost at the levels of work, employment and industrial relations through a combination of coercive and consent-based strategies. Utilising a combination of archival sources, management publications,

and oral history interviews with former managers and employees, he found significant variations between firms in the use of scientific, personnel and industrial relations management. Like Frances, he argued a combination of factors including firm structure, ownership, product and labour markets, explained some of these variations, as well as other actors such as arbitration tribunals and trade unions which sought to regulate and possibly control practices. Wright also stressed the impact of other firm-external actors including knowledge diffusion agents such as management consultancies, government departments and professional associations.[27]

An increasing number of studies have now appeared in Australian labour history and industrial relations journals exploring various features of management control over work and linking this to different theoretical concerns. Examples here included Taksa's study of 'Taylorism' as a cultural ideology of workplace change in her study of scientific management in the NSW Railway workshops, Cockfield's exploration of the impact of state arbitration on managerial prerogative and workplace control in the Victorian metal industry, and Bramble's investigation of the origins of industrial relations strategy in the post-war auto manufacturing industry.[28] Indeed by the late 1990s it was possible to discern a number of key themes that underpinned the Australian study of the history of the labour process. First, and in line with overseas labour process writing, Australian researchers quickly moved beyond a concern with deskilling as the dominant form of managerial control to a consideration of a broader range of employer strategies. Hence, while there has been significant attention (and some might argue a preoccupation) with Taylorism and scientific management, there has also been extensive investigation of technological change, corporate welfarism, company unionism, personnel management, and industrial relations strategies.[29] Second, the Australian literature placed particular emphasis on the role of the state as both a potential constraint on employer activity, as well as a source of legitimation for managerial authority. For example, Quinlan's study of management strategy in the steel industry stressed the critical role of arbitration courts as enforcers of managerial prerogative. The state also proved pivotal in advocating for new forms of management practice over time, whether it was Whitley Councils in the 1920s, personnel management in the 1940s and 1950s, or industrial democracy and work redesign in the 1970s and 1980s.[30] Third, Australian researchers emphasised the role of labour and trade union response to management practice as a key determinant in the spread of techniques such as scientific management and more formalised personnel and industrial relations management. This extended beyond a view of labour as a homogenous entity and stressed the importance of skill, gender and ethnic divisions as central to the contestation that followed workplace change. A prime example in this regard were studies of the post-war steel and auto industries, which emphasised the important role of a large migrant workforce for employer strategies of mass production. As Lever-Tracy and Quinlan noted, the divided nature of the working class in post-war Australia meant very different workplace experiences in terms of the patterns of work intensification.[31]

While the frequency of published Australian research on the history of management strategy, technological change and employer practice has declined in recent years, there have been a number of notable studies which have further broadened our knowledge of these issues with respect to under-researched industries and practices. For example, recent studies by Pragnell and Balnave have done much

to expand our understanding of corporate welfarism, a concept which is extensively documented overseas. Similarly, business historians such as Merrett and Seltzer have undertaken a detailed exploration of personnel practices in the early Australian banking industry and helped to expand our understanding of service sector labour management practice. Finally, while the details of labour management in unionised industries is increasingly well documented, we know surprisingly little about the history of employment practices in small firms and non-unionised companies, although an interesting article by Kerr provides useful insights into this neglected part of Australian industrial history.[32]

However, beyond widening the ambit of our empirical focus, are there other conceptual insights that can be applied to a labour process perspective of Australian history? In the section that follows I consider some possibilities for broadening the conceptual lens of historical workplace studies and whether recent debates in the fields of workplace sociology and organisation studies might offer inspiration for a renewed appreciation of the labour process.

Future Directions for Historically-Informed Labour Process Research

Despite the declining academic popularity of labour process analysis, there is still significant potential for further historical work in a labour process tradition which draws on new and emerging themes from the broader social sciences. Focusing on recent developments in workplace sociology and organisational studies, a number of areas offer significant potential for future historical research.

Managerial and Professional Identity

A key theme of much recent research in organisation and critical management studies has been the issue of managerial identity and the contradictory location of managers as both controllers of subordinate employees, as well as being subject to control themselves in terms of their performance and work intensity. Indeed, a growing body of literature has highlighted how managerial employees have been a particular focus of organisational restructuring through 'downsizing', 'reengineering' and 'delayering'.[33] These trends are often portrayed as recent phenomena, however we know surprisingly little about how managers themselves have been managed over time and how they have sought to rationalise their position of authority. While isolated historical insights can be found in studies of particular industries and company histories which have highlighted the important role of foremen and early innovations in 'staff' development and executive education, the history of how managerial cadres have developed in different Australian industry settings has yet to be comprehensively documented.[34] Exploring management and managers as specific subjects of historical inquiry could provide not only rich empirical insights, but also inform broader conceptual debates around self-perceptions of their role, the nature of leadership, and changes in managerial careers.

A second dimension of managerial identity relates to the potential for fractions of management to emerge around distinct functional and occupational traditions. For example, Armstrong's studies of the history of inter-occupational competition between accounting, engineering and personnel specialists in British industry, and Shenhav's study of the history of the engineering profession highlight the importance of intra-managerial competition and 'turf wars' based around defined

occupational specialisms. For instance, the history of personnel and human resource management highlights how different management specialists are often engaged in a 'professional project' aimed at increasing their legitimacy and status as functional experts. However, these claims to professional status are rarely uncontested, nor are they necessarily successful. While existing research sheds some light on the varying fortunes of different management functions over time, we are yet to see similar studies to those of Armstrong and Shenhav with regard to the history of Australian 'managerial professions'.[35]

Organisational Change and Management Innovation

A second theme which may offer insight for further historical research on the labour process and managerial strategy is the issue of organisational change and management innovation. Again while there is a significant mainstream and critical management literature focused on these issues, historical research into the reasons why and how employers change control practices over time could provide valuable insights into an area that is dominated by a largely 'presentist' methodology, and which sees contemporary change as unprecedented.[36] As studies such as Pettigrew's analysis of ICI and Child and Smith's study of Cadbury demonstrate, longitudinal and historical case studies of business organisations and their approaches to labour can provide useful insights into the role of changes in managerial personnel and values, corporate governance, technologies, and markets in the evolution of managerial control. While there are many interesting histories of major Australian companies which provide empirical insights into some of these issues, it is rare to find academic investigations of single-company cases which engage with these broader theoretical debates. Potential topics for such historical case studies of organisational change could include the different strategies and forms through which managers 'manage change', as well as the political nature of organisational change as a process involving contested interests.[37]

The Nature and Control of Service Work

A third theme for future historical research relates to recent contributions to the study of *service work*. A legitimate criticism of much of the first and second-generation labour process literature was its focus on manufacturing industries to the exclusion of service work. While there have been several Australian historical studies of service industries such as retail and banking, these are less common than studies of manufacturing industries, where the techniques of formalised shopfloor production control, personnel and industrial relations management predominate.[38] Moreover, while historical research on employer strategies such as corporate welfarism have touched on issues of service work,[39] historical studies into the labour process of Australian service work could be expanded.

A broadened focus on the history of service work could for instance include a broader range of service settings such as airlines, hospitality, health services, and financial and professional business services. Several good overseas examples in this regard are Yates' history of communication and office technologies, and Downey's historical investigation of telegraph messengers, both of which highlight the complex interplay of technology, skills and managerial control in diverse service work settings.[40] Second, the theoretical lens could be broadened to include new concepts

from contemporary studies of service work. Key examples here include theoretical constructs such as 'emotional' and 'aesthetic' labour. For instance, these concepts might provide significant conceptual purchase in industries such as the airline industry and other 'frontline' work where customer engagement is a key source of perceived service quality.[41]

Globalisation and Comparative Labour Process Analysis

Finally, a fourth area for future historical research of the labour process relates to the *globalisation of work*. In particular, there is a need to extend Australian insights of managerial practice within a broader comparative historical understanding of different institutional and cultural contexts. While there are many insightful studies into the changing nature of work in newly industrialised settings, many of these adopt a contemporary perspective, or adopt a single country historical review.[42] Genuine *comparative* historical research into the evolution of the labour process is less common, but what work has been conducted has provided valuable insights by highlighting differences that single-country studies often assume as givens.[43] For example, several studies have explored the comparative history of Australian, Canadian and British employer practice, and stressed the importance of economic structure, shared cultural heritage, geographic location and paths of knowledge diffusion, as key factors underlying variations in the extent and sophistication of management practice. Indeed, the expansion of historical comparative research into a broader range of settings with similar colonial or resource-intensive economies to Australia (for example, South America or Africa) may provide even richer conceptual insights regarding the role of diverse institutional and cultural contexts.[44]

One useful conceptual model in this respect is provided by Smith and Meiksins, who emphasise an historical approach to the study of comparative political economy and workplace relations. In particular, their model goes beyond the dichotomy of national difference versus economic convergence, and stresses the importance of a 'dominance effect' of perceived 'superior' or legitimate models of management practice. These and related insights such as Abrahamson's concept of 'management fashion' provide space for a more agential view of managers and other diffusion agents (such as consultants, 'management intellectuals' and business schools), in the promotion and adoption of new management practice. From a historical perspective, changes in the labour process are then seen as occurring within a broader international context of management knowledge diffusion, varying levels of economic development, and distinct national institutional variations which can impede or promote the adoption of new and hybrid forms of shopfloor control.[45]

Conclusion

The growth of post-structuralism and the 'discursive turn' that now characterises mainstream critical management studies has resulted in a waning of academic interest in traditional labour process analysis. Rather than a homogenous and all-powerful management exerting total control over its workforce, conceptions of work now encapsulate a more nuanced view of control and resistance, which provides space for the subjective perceptions and views of the managers and the managed. Importantly however, workplace sociology, work organisation and labour management continue to be vibrant areas of research as evidenced by the volume

of critical studies on new industries and types of 'atypical' work. For instance, research into agency employment, call centres and the global outsourcing and relocation of work demonstrate a continued empirical and conceptual concern with how employees are managed at work, and increasingly how these employees and managers understand their role and identity at work.[46]

Australian research on the history of the labour process, while somewhat later to develop than in the USA and UK, has provided a significant body of scholarship which has revealed a multi-faceted pattern of employer strategies. While the central concern of labour process analysis involves a straightforward distinction between the potential and reality of employees to produce value (labour power versus labour), how employers seek to ensure such a conversion has resulted in an increasingly complex picture. Issues of managerial control, deskilling, technological change and worker resistance have been highlighted as key components of the Australian workplace over time. However, the Australian labour process has also been distinctive in the limited and variable uptake of specific control strategies (for example, scientific management), the strength of organised labour, and the critical role that the state has played as a regulator of workplace behaviour and a bulwark for managerial prerogative.

While interest in the labour process from an historical perspective has perhaps declined in recent years, drawing on recent contributions from critical management and organisation studies offers insights for further historical investigation. This paper has highlighted four areas where recent research may offer conceptual inspiration, specifically, questions of managerial and professional identity; organisational change and management innovation; the nature and control of service work; and globalisation and comparative labour process analysis. These are areas which offer potentially rich and interesting historical terrain. Far from the death of labour process analysis proclaimed by its critics, I would suggest there is plenty of life left for a conceptual framework that focuses on a core feature of human existence – the nature of work.

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Endnotes

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