Chapter III: The Labour Process Debate

But French Regulationism is not a strong theory within the Labor process boundary line, without ignoring the significance of the Taylorism, Fordism, and Post-Fordism concepts, since its main goal is to explain the global dynamics of capitalism and not particular changes in Labor processes. Thus, while Fordism within this theory is also a type of Labor Process, it is, primarily, the correlation between mass production and mass consumption. Likewise, its concern is not about labor process control, but about the creation of institutions (as a system of broader industrial and economic-political relations), in order to achieve well-balanced growth and the best possible product distribution. Labor process analysis has stronger analytical traditions than Regulationism like Labor sociology in Germany and France or Industrial Relations in Britain and The United States.

The main concepts will now be summarised in both the internal and external debate, the so-called "Labor Process Debate", as an attempt to incorporate into discussion one of the most significant currents of labor processes transformations.

A. First stage: Braverman’s approach.

According to Thompson, there are three phases of the Labor Process Debate (Thompson, 1983): 1) the first coinciding with Braverman's deskilling thesis; 2) when different conclusions about the problem of such deskilling and control were obtained in the late 1970s, and 3) when the existence of capitalism phases in relation to Labor processes was discussed in the 1980s. In the 1990s, as we will see, there is an implicit doubt about the possibility of a labor process theory.

Braverman had the merit of having broken with the optimistic points of view of Industrial Sociology and Industrial Relations of the 1960s. These conceptions considered technological advance as a liberation in human work. This was the sort of conclusion reached by Blauner, supposedly inspired by Marx's alienation concept. Likewise, Mallet, from a workerist point of view (the New Working Class of the automated processes would have more control over its work), Touraine, who in his third phase of the professional organisation forms stated the trend toward requalification, and Friedman, who was ambivalent but not contrary to the optimistic position to the future of labour. On the other
hand, the sociotechnical approach focused at the Tavistock Institute and School of Industrial Relations starting from Dunlop (Sorensen, 1995), (Dunlop, 1958), (Kerr, 1969), (Edwards, 1995), consider the New Human Relations with their "Job Enlargement" and "Job Enrichment", as aspects of capitalism capacity to achieve a conflict solving regulated system between capital and work. Through standards and the regulation of the industrial relations system, did not eliminate the conflict (as in the unitary solution), they did prevent the contradictions from becoming catastrophic (Clegg, 1975), (Edwards, 1979).

Braverman's merit was, therefore, to connect labor process to Political Economy, but within a context of workers struggles for control over their labor conditions (Edwards, 1979). This relation between the process of valorisation and the labor process was not a new conception. Marx had already regarding the conception of capitalist production like valorisation and at the same time as a labour process; especially in the fourth section of Das Kapital on the step of manufacture towards big industry, and in other parts related to alienation, fetishism and subsumption. It briefly reappeared in historical Marxism with the councils; with Rose Luxembourg, Gramsci, and, in a special way, Panzieri, which from the 1960s introduced more sophisticated concepts than Braverman's to the labor process and its political consequences (De la Garza, 1988)

But Italian workerism had a very limited impact outside that country, especially among scholars who were not closely related to labor struggles. Ten years after Panzieri's death, Braverman published his famous book Labor and Capital Monopolist (1974), supported by the socialist project of Monthly Review.

Braverman tried to start from Marx, first as long as work means a conscious act over a labour object using working instruments. Like in Adam Smith, the capitalist labor division was a necessity to increase productivity (for Smith it was a production need in general); but this had consequences, firstly, in work organisation, the division between manual and intellectual work, alienation (of the product, the process, and other men), and work subordination to capital (from the formal to subordination to the instruments of work with mechanisation). Secondly, taken the capitalist Labor process stages (Simple Cooperation, Manufacture, and Big Industry), especially Manufacture and Big Industry with tendencies to loss control by the worker over his work and deskilling.

However, Braverman, trying to recover Marx, modified several of his notions: the difference between Manufacture and big Industry is not clear if it means mechanisation
(Labour process as a system of machines and controls of the worker for the machine) or if work organisation is the central point. Likewise, his limits for the stages of capitalist labour process does not coincide with Marx's. Braverman's view of the transformation of Manufacturing to Big Industry in the late nineteenth century, and in Marx's is from the Industrial Revolution and the rise of Mechanisation.

It is true that the central idea that capital does not buy work but a labor force and that to be valorised this capital has to dominate the worker in the labor process comes from Marx. The variable capital is variable because it has not predetermined its valorisation; that is the result of forces relationships inside and outside the labor process (Edwards, 1979). Braverman starts from this in order to analyse the labor process with his central concept of control, which is his translation to power issue, in opposition to the abstract principles of organisational theories and Industrial Sociology at his time. With this, he introduced a Neo-Marxist research line that is still in use, because others have had the capacity to discuss without dogmatism and to review problems and concepts from other angles (Smith, 1994). This line has originated from several researches which form a "non managerial" view has analysed changes in skill and forms of control, as well as labor process transformation causes, introducing a legitimate dialogue with the French Labor Sociology, Regulation Theories, and Industrial Relations.

In the late 1970s, from the debate on Labor process, several critical examinations to Braverman's approaches were made. The following are some of the most significant:

a) The problem if the labor process characteristics may be deduced from capital accumulation’s. For example, if the relative surplus requires real subsumption and, therefore, mechanisation, and if between formal and real subsumption, and between Manufacture and Big Industry, then there is a necessary sequence.

b) Therefore, is there in Braverman a functionalist conception between accumulation and control? The result of his negligence in both subjectivity and collective action could change the trends he notes in deskilling (Smith, 1994).

c) This, is there organisational determinism in regard to the control form, under a zero sum power model, in which someone's profit is someone else's loss? On the contrary, others state the diversity of power forms in the labor process. Despotic control would only be a possibility among many others (Thompson, 1983), since capital's purpose is not to control but profit maximisation. Therefore, the labor process would be conflictive, but could be also co-operative (Wood, 1987).
d) Braverman did not take into account the new "management" guidelines of his time, such as the labor humanisation current and the sociotechnical system, of significant importance for critics of F. Taylor's scientific management.

e) Besides, the problem if it is possible to define stages for Labor processes, knowing that different productive forms have always coexisted and, therefore, there are no trends, as Braverman thought, to workers homogenisation. With this respect, if the Britain case should be considered as the general model of capitalism development (Littler, 1982). Also, if Labor processes stages finish with Big Industry (Salam, 1980).

f) Finally, the absence of a Totality concept in Braverman, which could link manufacturing to extramannufacturing, structure to subjectivity and action, the State to economy and production.

Braverman died prematurely as director of the Monthly Review publishing house, and only once answered his critics (Braverman, 1982). In this answer, he pointed out, at best, that capitalist strategies did not have to be conscious, but that they were an objective result; that labor degradation was not completely subjected to technology; new technologies could represent task reunification, but capital controls the conception and execution of tasks through separate working class from specialists, and also polarises skills.

B. Second stage: from deskilling to plurality in forms of control

The second stage of the debate on the labor process was developed during the late 1970s, but depending on the author analysed it could continue into the 1980s (Wood, 1987), (Friedman, 1977), (Burawoy, 1979). In this stage it is still accepted that management develops control strategies over the labour force, but that these may vary, independent of Taylorism, according to labor resistance (Littler, 1982a). Also, the "panacea fallacy" was criticised in regard to the belief that management will always find substitutes for obsolete forms of control. On the other hand, in contradiction to Braverman, the existence of unilineal development in forms of control is no longer accepted; although the existence of historical stages, in terms of labor resistance, is still recognised. Most importantly the existence of objective trends in deskilling was denied.

This phase of the debate was useful (among other things) for specifying the control concept itself which in Braverman had different meanings such as the loss of capacity to
design and plan work; fragmentation; distance between skilled and unskilled workers; and the historical transformation from craftsmen to modern workers. Thus, nowadays it is common to talk of control dimensions and skillfulness, with an enlargement of the concept and the admission of control by consensus and not its reduction to repression. Salam, for example, defines control in terms of members of an organisation who have its actions determined or influenced by other members of the organisation (Salam, 1980). Littler, (1982); on the other hand, recognises three skill dimensions: 1) personal knowledge and abilities, 2) those required by the job, and 3) organisational skills. Regarding concertance of control acceptance as a central concept, but one not reduced to force, concepts which theoretically enriched this trend were woven.

Many started from Marx on the most abstract problem of the contradiction between capital and Labor. Edwards named it "the structured antagonism" (Edwards, 1995), stating that capital-Labor relations are exploitation relations and not only despotic control relations; that this is the struggle basis to transform the labor force into work, seeking to maximise the workers effort. But this faces several forms of struggle and resistance; that is, there is a range of possible tactics that capital may follow, but which are determined by the workers and market pressures.

Several are the attempts to construct types of control forms, for example, Edwards talked about direct control, when the owner directly supervises work; his deals with small business in which the owner decides each situation, supposedly corresponding to competitive capitalism. Technical control would be exercised through machines, like the one described by Marx, to be exercised after the Industrial Revolution. As organisations grew, the monopolistic capitalism and a class struggle increment would bring into existence a bureaucratic control. However, in reality these three control forms would coexist with varying degrees of importance (Edwards, 1979); this is, no necessary evolution would exist in the control forms, but Control Cycles, conditioned by product demand, the lack of labour hands, and labour organisations power. The Control Crisis is behind the control cycles concept, ruled by the labor process conflicts.

Structured antagonism is directed by the existence of informal rules, questionable formal rules, the presence or absence of trade union, and the also appealable legal framework, i.e., different rules may be applied to a situation and should be interpreted to have sense. The
background is that in the labor contract the amount of Labor that the worker should provide is indefinite, the working ability is what is bought, not the Labor itself; i.e., in order to make production work, there has to be an order negotiation. Taylorism would only be the end of a broader process, of very limited applications but with a powerful ideology. In this way, management can maintain its authority, making workers identify with the company competitiveness and responsible for their work with a minimum of supervision (Responsible Autonomy) (Friedman, 1977).

In this stage, the most significant conclusion was that there has to be not only despotic control, but consensus as well; that workers do not always need to be controlled, and that Braverman made a mistake ignoring the existence of legitimisation in the labor process and not as imposed ideas, but as lived fetishised experiences. Perhaps, Burawoy's theory was the most complex of all (Burawoy, 1979); in which he analyses how the consensus was obtained through management in the work place, independently from external causes. For this, he uses a Marxist starting point, combined with the sociology of power and of the organisations. With this, he outlines his games theory, by which, uncertainties during the labor process would be like plays which would both make stress less severe and disperse conflict. In this way, the game means the worker approval of the company's rules, but the result is uncertain and the workers may play on their benefit.

C. Third stage: from the stages of control to the contingency

Central elements in the debate's third stage on the labor process already present them in the second stage, but lacked the centrality which late acquired. This concerns with the mid of 1980s, although there are earlier works from the late 1970s, and coincides with the emergence of Regulationist theories and the so-called management international explosion of the "new wave", which rediscovered the flexible enterprise. As we will see, the course of the debate on the labor process, stands opposite stagism, structuralism, and the optimism of the Post-Industrial or Post-Modern "New Times", would lead them to be the most consistent critics of those trends.

Burawoy had already stated that, during work, informal rules and practices should be considered not as routines, but as games (Burawoy, 1979). In this game there is the approval
of capitalist production rules, but conflict is endemic. Conflict revolves around the game. On one hand, management pressure to optimise resources (time and money), and on the other, the workers’ interests lead to conflict, but also to transformation of management itself. In these games, allowing the workers self-organisation could be more effective in order to intensify Labour instead of the separation between conception and execution. In the game, conflicts are horizontalised on the factory floor, and are individualised (Knights, 1990).

In other words, it would not be dependence between organisation and control (Wood, 1987) and management could use different forms of organisation. In other words, deskilling is not necessary, nor dependent on management's will, because part of this is tacit, i.e., is generated during production routines, the learning of not routine tricks, and from collective skills; these cannot be expropriated.

In this stage, the idea that management consciously seeks control over the labor force is critiqued, leading to a denial of the concept of enterprise strategy. This breaks up into multiple mediations and, above all, into an idea that changes do not obey great plans, but purely contingent matters, i.e., a labour process contingency theory is believed as consequence, although considering the structured conflict; there are no more methods, technologies, organisation of control forms of a stage, but diversity, adaptations with not totally conscious individuals, nor completely rational.

In general, the ability of the labour process debates great authors’ (Edward’s, Burawoy, Thompson, Freedman, and Hyman) to link Labor to other levels of reality such as the State or the Economy has been limited. This is in spite of the different efforts made with the control cycles concepts, with historical types in Edward’s, or through Burrow’s Factory Regimes, with which he tries to link the changes in the industrial relations system with the labour process. Thus, in the factory regimes typology, there is the despotic which would be common within liberal capitalism, with a little Labor regulation; the hegemonic which corresponds to organised capitalism with the industrial relations systems; and the current or homogenic despotic (Burawoy, 1985). When in the 1980s Post-Fordism became a significant international theory, the Labor Process Debate inspirers were already busy with denying the importance of changes in the labour process, managerial strategies, and the correlation between the labour process and others levels of reality. To such an extent, that considered as minimum current changes (Wood, 1987), through the Taylorism view like not
an inflexible way, when considering different kind of Taylorism, also the national and local mediations, with denial that control is a strategy (management is not unified, there are also struggles within it and many of their practices are purely pragmatic), or by following the line which states that the labour process is not correlated to capital accumulation, the State or the Industrial Relations System. If capitalism is in crisis and the previous period was Fordist, this would not necessarily be in crisis (Steward, 1992). Among English authors, few have approved the Post-Fordist thesis, the important exceptions being Jessop's views, Marxism Today's, and Kaplinsky's. Jessop considers that Neo-Liberalism is only one possibility of change among others for capitalism, and that it does not have the greatest chance of success; on the other hand, he considers that the State will tend to be more 'Schumpeterian', i.e., will be a promoter of accumulation, rather than an investor (Holloway, 1988). According to Marxism Today, the current stage already presages Post-Modern society (Clarke, 1990). Kaplisky combines Neo-Schumpeteranism (the approval of big cycles according to technological change), the new international division of Labor (the transfer of significant manufacturing segments to underdeveloped countries), and, recently, Piore's and Sabel's flexible specialisation (by stressing the advantages of small and medium enterprises faced with large enterprises within a context of variability in demand, using reset microelectronic technologies that would make production competitive on a smaller scale) (Kaplisky, 1984), (Kaplisky, 1990).

Writers on labour process have held important debates, which are sophisticated in theoretical reasoning and empirically well-based, but which offer fears suggestions for theoretical alternatives.

1). The Debate on Japaneisation.

The enthusiasm of those who support the idea of the flexible enterprise from management, as well as those who agree with the Post-Fordist idea about the end of Fordism and the beginning of a flexible regulation mode, has led them to consider the Japanese case as a living example of the New Times. However, as Wood stresses, there are three level of analysis on Japaneisation: 1) If Japanese experience, including its institutions and culture, is globally reproducible in other countries, 2) the experience of Japanese transplants abroad, and 3) whether there is a general trend in management inspired by the Japanese style (Wood, 1991). In this regard, Wood suggests that Toyotism be defined
exclusively as the management style and the notion of Japaneisation be used for Japanese social relations. Using this difference, we can analyse the main positions which belong, on one hand, to Oliver and Wilkinson, who approve of Japaneisation spreading, although they recognise that there are institutional obstacles; Dohse, Jurgen, and Malsch, who do not approve of the idea of the Japaneisation spreading, because of the Japanese specificity, and deny that success in productive is mainly due to culture; on the other hand, they were consider as more significant the industrial relations system institutions and new forms of control by the group. The last position is for Dore, he approves the context influence but highlights the possibility of management convergence towards an "organisation oriented system".

Wood's criticism means that Toyotism itself as a management style is also an ideal type in Japan (Wood, 1993). Moreover, co-operation in the Japanese labour style is not a condition for success in production, because there can be functional equivalents. The Just in Time, for example, would not go against mass production, but would simply be a different method for the same purposes. In other words, Japanese methods would be methods of mass and line production and would not have the functional flexibility which is proclaimed in managements books, although it is considered that workers take more active part in this nation than in the West. Between Fordism and Toyotism would be continuity (in further studies, Wood considers Toyotism as Neo-Fordism), cycles are still short, labour fragmentary, there is labour standardisation and measurement, and the division between conception and execution remains. On the other hand, Fordism itself would not have been as rigid (Tolliday, 1992), and its history would have been a step away from the Ford T model of inflexibility to competitive loss in the face of production strategy of several brands from General Motors (Sloanism), with shorter lines, less specialised machines, and different brands.

Finally, Japaneisation would be an institutional social settlement which makes the operation of Toyotism in production easier. The most significant components of its institutions include labour market segmentation between large, medium, and small enterprises; wages paid in function of years of service in larger enterprises; supervisors acting as the workers production leaders; the ‘enterprise's home union’, that is compromised with productivity; over-time still not paid; and, above all, extensive consultation with workers to get them involved in production planning and programming.
2). The Flexibility Discussion.

The flexibility discussion is currently one of the most significant undertaken by this current together with Post-Fordism. In this discussion, the debate's position over the labour process is in opposition to others which have stressed it in a positive way. Anna Pollert is considered one of the most important critics (Pollert, 1991), (Pollert, 1989).

Pollert acknowledges the context in which the labour flexibility thesis is wedged as optimistic, and which started a new era in conceptualisations, with a breaking point with the first one. All of this coincides with a relaunching of the Neo-Classic economy, as one of the sources which proclaims the necessary flexibility of labour markets. The OCDE defends this flexibilisation, winning in hegemony. The other source comes directly from management ("New Wave" management because Toffler's "Third Wave") and the recovery of the constitution of a double proletariat in the enterprise, one from the qualified centre, stable, well paid and with control over its work, and the other, flexible externally, with temporary contracts, part-time, in peripheral departments, and less qualified. According to Pollert, Post-Fordist currents (the three best known are Neoschupeterian, on technological cycles; French Regulationism, supposedly Marxist; and, the flexible specialisation of Piore and Sabel) match Neo-Liberal flexibility because both consider the flexible future of labour optimistically (Pollert, 1988).

There are two aspects to the criticism of flexibility: on the one hand, to demonstrate that labour relations have not changed significantly (this does not go to the core of Post-Fordist and management approaches, including the Neo-Liberalist's, since all these do not stress that the "New Times" are already operating, but that these may be the future); and theoretical reasoning in the sense that extreme flexibility cannot work under the conditions of production. The empirical facts are shown by the English case (which is presented by none of the others as an example of successful flexibility). In this country national surveys show that in terms of numerical flexibility there were less temporary workers employed in the 1980s than before; and that subcontracting is not used in most enterprises, and has even decreased. With regard to functional flexibility (polyvalence, and internal mobility, among others), it is accepted that in the labour process management has preferred it with consequences in power profit as well as work intensification; but in polyvalence, there exist at best a mosaic of modest changes, without any appearance of the "future craft" workers. This is, there is little evidence of polyvalence (outside large corporations and for central workers), but instead, more "by stress" productivity, although "job enlargement" is
still growing. Likewise, it is denied that there is a flexibility consciousness and systematic enterprise strategies (no coherent enterprise strategy can exist if there is a lack of information and because management is divided) (Hyman and Streek, 1988), instead, there are ad hoc policies. Management has not been extremist, it has tried to balance flexibility with the need to have skilled workers. However, in services the growth of part time and temporary workers has been proved, although this is an older process than the flexibilisation new wave. Finally, in regard to the supposedly superior flexibility of small and medium enterprises as proclaimed in the flexible specialisation theory, it can be empirically proved that small firms are less innovative, have longer work times, lower salaries, and don’t use many "craftsmen".

3). Critics to Post-Fordism

In recent years, critics against Post-Fordism have taken up much of the debates on the labour process. On one the hand, Post-Fordism theorists are asked about the common confusion in economic science between diagnostic and normativiness, i.e., by first establishing abstract conditions of the effective operation of markets, or in this case of production, an a priori state that reality should fulfil these conditions. Since Post-Fordism does not exist empirically, Hyman stated that Post-Fordists objectively became justifiers of the Neo-Liberals flexibilising and rationalising measures, without recognising that there are several national variations and that in Europe extreme Neo-Liberalism exists only in England, the economy of which is not an example of efficiency and competitiveness (Ferner and Hyman, 1992).

According to Wood the Post-Fordist model is presented as a overcoming the rigidities of Fordism, but it is incorrect to see Fordism as rigid; practical Taylorism can never be the absolute divorce of conception and execution. Production could not work in this way because in the labour process not everything is predictable; machine's control over the work place is relative due to failures; historically, Taylorism-Fordism was only applied to certain parts of the production process and certain type of process; for example, it is less applicable in continuos flux and in Batch processes. Post-Fordists have turned conveyers-belt work into something typical of every form of capitalist labour in the twentieth century, but this is incorrect; Taylorism focuses on individual job analysis, but states little about material transfers during the process and about non production departments, in particular inventory, and the whole integration process. Mass production does no necessarily have to be rigid, besides which it has not empirically proven that mass
production tends to be substituted by small scale diversified production. Post-Fordists consider the Japanese management model as a prototype of flexible relations, but Toyotism, which is nothing but a combination of Total Quality Control and Just In Time (JIT) discusses it but continues to follow Fordism. JIT is not only efficient in small scale production, although this has proved that stocks are unavoidable. Moreover, involvement as pre-designed by management reinforces the division between conception and execution, and delegation through quality circles does not deny management control and may be combined with coercion if selfdiscipline fails; the supposed goodness of the internal labour markets (notion wedged by Piore, transferring the external market struggle for jobs to the factory) may be a prison for all workers.

In Britain in particular, as Hyman reaffirms, in many cases the step from scientific management to Post-Fordism has not been taken, but from no scientific management (informal workers control) (Edwards, 1995) to flexibility. In this country, there are sectors which almost introduced Fordism when this was considered as surpassed. "Craft" is a minority and combines with "semiskilled" (Wood, 1989).

Since for many years technological or organisational determinism has been rejected, in Post-Fordism reviews it is reaffirmed that advanced technology does not need labour flexibility and, also, that this may be counter-productive for productivity in the long term facing technological and product changes.

At a macro-economic level these critics state that labour flexibility may be transformed into greater inequality together with its implications for product demand, i.e., Post-Fordism would also have limits, although it tries to resolve a fundamental capitalist contradiction between over accumulation and crisis. The problem is that this contradiction cannot be solved with both institutional measures and new labour organisation (Gilbert, 1992). Besides, Post-Fordism does not resolve the dialectic between flexibility and workers’ resistance; nor between flexibility and workers vulnerability; nor the possible emergency of new skilled workers conscious of their fortress; or, finally, how to achieve co-operation in production plans of non-central workers who remain semiskilled.

In a world where knowledgement and powers intermingle or become mixed up, and where legitimate theories have been substituted by new orthodoxies, the labour debate has brought a breath of fresh air into the discussion on the future of production, workers, and trade unions. The starting point, according to the great majority of these authors, still remains Marx's statement that the capital invested in the labour force is variable, i.e., the surplus with respect to the labour force value is not predetermined by the simple purchase of labour force, but that this is determined, above all, in the labour process. This results in an unavoidable conflict of structural characteristics, but, at the same time, in the difficulties to enclose the organisation of labour processes in rigid frameworks. The labour process debate is against structuralism, so common in the economic theories, French Regulationism, and Neo-Schupeterianism in the sense that, on the one hand, structures determine the actions and subjectivity of the actors, but, also, in opposition to its combination with Functionalism, for which changes in a structure result (in spite of lack of synchronically) in the transformation of other structures. For example, limits to mass production supposedly result in the flexibilisation of labour relations. In these concepts, there is not only implicit Structuralism and Functionalism, but Evolutionism. The current acknowledgement of Regulation Modes’ parallels by French regulationists which, supposedly, has turned into less inflexible its structuralism (for example, the current coexistence of Neo-Taylorism with both Toyotism and Kalmaniarism) does not necessary mean that it has not a convergentionist characteristic, from the moment that the support to Kalmaniarism and, also, to reformed Toyotism it is not an humanistic matter in them, but, above all, it is a matter of productive efficiency and, therefore, of who will remain in the market in the medium or long term.

On the other hand, among the labour process debate theorists there is a persistent conflict recovery, especially within the labour process as a fundamental determinant to explain changes and, at the same time, the lack of convergence towards one productive brand. This is reinforced with the empirical evidence of extra-enterprise institutional diversity which also shapes productive changes and reassure their non- homogeneity or homogenisation trend (Hyman and Streek, 1988), (Wood, 1989), (Smith, 1994).

But, in this debate there are unsolved significant theoretical and, above all, methodological problems, and due to their extent and level of abstraction this does not
apply to this current alone. The first is the character of the concepts and theories with respect to concrete reality. In the beginning, labour process theorists created diverse typologies which were sometimes related to capitalist production stages, but which were forgotten later relegated to a contingency view that would hardly lead to any theory. By avoiding Structuralism and giving dynamism to the subjects’ action they ended up denying theoretical correlations and to reducing coexistence to empirical evidence, in order to return to the consideration of several variations and exceptions and end up without trends. This current did not have known how to resolve properly, except for the structuralism, functionalisms and evolutionisms critiques, the trends problems, and how to relate structures to both action and subjectivity in a new form.

Critiques of “ideal types” do not get to the bottom of the relationship between theory and dates. But, the ideal type is only one of the significant ideas about the concepts’ characteristics, originally supported by Weber, who stress that society has no structure; it is amorphous. In this way, the ideal type is only an instrument of knowledge, and its characteristics are conscious exaggerations and unilateralisations; "casual" relations among ideal types do not pretend to reflect real hierarchies. Quite different is Marx's position in relation to historically determined abstractions, those which exist in real life from social relations and that are not universals. On the other hand, Marxist abstractions, in theory at least, try to incorporate the contradiction, putting limits in spaces of possibilities for action. In this way, the structure, theoretically understood, is not separate from action and its outcome, although open possibilities; but, is open only in a space of objective possibilities, without deterministic outcomes but located within this space. Thus, the long term is not predictable but, subsequently, it is possible to trace a posteriori course changes that could be denominated with specific concepts.

Changes of direction are possible as rough changes with certain continuities, above all, these are changes of direction in relations of forces, as that which has been produced with the coming of Neo-Liberalism.

This is, the great theoretical uncertainty this debate led to is whether it could be theory over the labour process, articulated with other reality levels, trying to escape from Structuralism and any reductionism. But, from a concept of reality, to which the theory cannot be universal, nor the relation between concept nor in its own concepts; there is the permanent need to rediscover or reaffirm the concepts. Second, theorisation does not mean
necessary trends but outcomes from the a posteriori historical process, which bring together structures, subjectivities, and actions. Third, in the present there isn’t only one a line of change, but neither are they totally random or contingent; changes, as Marx stated, are made by men but under conditions they did not choose; these conditions, which were not chosen, mark limits to viable action in the conjuncture; but if History is the articulation of conjunctures, the long term course of events cannot be redefined except in more or less abstract possibilities.

In this respect, purely empirical trends could be lost in a ocean of particularisms. This is the case of several of the critics of the current to flexibility as a trend. To say that the context is not predictable, that enterprise strategies have competitive not coherent elements, that these have to be constantly reinterpreted by the parties in order to have sense (Edwards, 1995); that these are not simple adaptations, that the objectives are open, that there is no empirical evidence that management have clear control strategies (Wood, 1988) (Hyman, 1987), or that are not strictly rational calculations in these problems, is to point out the complex, empirical realities with a lot of mediations and diversity. But that in the limit may lead to Empiricism, to negation of theory or the capacity to acknowledge the most influent factors in the processes than. To talk of enterprise strategies does not necessarily mean to give them rational choice characteristics, nor an absence of conflicts, nor to say that the planned outcomes aren’t different from concrete outcomes, nor that, on certain levels, there are different management strategies. But all this is different from denying that the enterprise has and is in a network of structures that pressure on it, and that theorisation should mean the capacity to abstract secondary factors. Second, if strategy as a theoretical object is a construction or a resultant of theoretical enterprise subjects, that should have empirical verification but, once again, doing without so much mediations and particularisms in front of which, if there is not theorisation, there will be no way to escape from empirism.

Being concerned with subjectivity and conflict, the studies, at best, resulted in types of control, without considering the more abstract relations among structures, subjectivities, and collective action. For this purpose, the concept of structure also failed receive sophisticated treatment.

From our point of view, the labour process debate is in difficulties; out of the
accumulation of more cases and reviews, and above all, by a rejection of broader theorisation and its highlighting of critical examinations without reconstruction during its latest phase.

However, the labour process debate still remains as a great effort to up-date Marxism, to establish a dialogue with Sociology and the Political Sciences, although it would have to be, once again, subverted, like Braverman on his origins, in order to take another step forward, primarily in the theoretical plane.