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The objective of this edited volume in the *Critical Perspectives on Work and Employment* series is to explore the interrelationships – theoretically and empirically – between the labour process and labour process theory (LPT), on the one hand, and global value chains (GVC) and related frameworks, such as global commodity chains (GCC) and global production networks (GPN), on the other. Until relatively recently the extent of convergence between these two bodies of work had been quite undeveloped. In summary, GCC, GVC and GPN theorizing and research, notwithstanding significant distinctions between them (Bair, 2008), neglected or generally understated labour as an analytical category (Smith *et al.*, 2002; Cumbers *et al.*, 2008), while conversely LPT generally eschewed the significance of these various global frameworks.

It is no longer legitimate to claim the categorical omission of labour in studies of global production networks. This objection remained largely valid in terms of GVC research, which, following Gereffi *et al.*’s (2005) influential theory of GVC governance, has tended to concentrate on inter-sectoral and firm linkages in ways that minimize the concerns of labour (Gibbon *et al.*, 2008). Yet with the emergence of the ‘Manchester school’ and the development of an alternative GPN more attention was given to the importance of labour within the matrix of factors that help to explain global geographies of production and exchange (Henderson *et al.*, 2002; Coe *et al.*, 2004). When Henderson *et al.* (2002: 448) stated that GPNs should acknowledge the ‘conditions under which labour power is converted into actual labour through the labour process’, they hinted not merely at the general inclusion of
labour as a factor of production affecting firms’ locational decisions and resultant production geographies, but also at the potential integration of labour process analysis with chain or network theorizing.

However, this specific promise went largely unfulfilled thereafter. For although some saw workers and collective organizations as integral to the GPN project (Coe et al., 2008), much of the burgeoning literature rather tended to consider labour as the object of the restructuring process, reflecting and reproducing an orthodox ‘factor of production’ approach. For Cumbers et al. (2008) the urgent task was to ‘bring labour back in’ by, initially, theorizing its agency in GPNs as an active constituent of the global economy, and then exploring the ‘positionality’ of unions within this framework.

In recent years, a growing responsiveness to this critique and a proliferation of attempts to redress the ‘labour deficit’ from within economic geography and its labour geography sub-field (e.g. Cumbers et al., 2008, 2010; Coe and Jordhus-Lier, 2011; Rainnie et al., 2011; Coe and Hess, 2013 and special edition of Geoforum), have occurred. In a parallel trend, scholars working within the GVC tradition have become increasingly sceptical of the ‘upgrading’ hypothesis in the literature on global chains. Simply put, there is now widespread criticism of the idea that participating in GVCs necessarily leads to economic upgrading for workers in terms of improved labour standards (e.g. Barrientos et al., 2011; Werner 2012; Barrientos, 2013; and the 2013 special issues of Competition and Change edited by Taylor et al.).

Just as scholars of global production networks were acknowledging the importance of integrating labour into their analytical frameworks, LPT influenced studies were seeking to utilize the explanatory purchase of the global chain and network perspectives to grapple with the nature of employment and the experience of work in contemporary capitalism (e.g. Flecker and Meil, 2010; Newsome, 2010; Newsome et al., 2013; Taylor, 2010; Riisgaard and Hammer, 2011). Nevertheless, these engagements constituted only the beginnings of an integration between hitherto discrete domains. An explicit focus on the labour process and LPT, as opposed to labour in its manifold dimensions, has remained underdeveloped.

Having indicated the limited and selective convergence between LPT and the GCC/GVC/GPN frameworks to date, in the remainder of this introduction we lay out the broad conceptual territory that underpins and informs this volume. It is appropriate to begin with a consideration of LPT, identifying what have been regarded as its core characteristics and articulating some recently acknowledged problematics, including that of ‘connectivity’ (Thompson, 2010). How the mechanisms of control
and workplace transformation are related to the broader political economy clearly has significance for understanding the power, asymmetry and coordination within and across global value chains and production networks.

This preface then reflects on the loosely connected frameworks (Bair, 2008) of chains and frameworks, but hones in on some essential differences between them in their diverse attempts to map, describe, analyse and understand geographically dispersed systems of production and the position of labour within them. Subsequently, the introduction appraises the recent debates in economic and labour geography, assessing the strengths and limitations of the attempts made to overcome the ‘labour deficit’. This discussion includes a critical evaluation of the salience of labour process analysis. Finally, we provide brief summaries of the volume’s chapters before concluding with some observations regarding directions for future research and conceptual development.

**Labour Process Theory and Analysis**

With its origins in a Marxist understanding of the nature of work under capitalism, a focus on the labour process has provided a fertile arena for scholars wishing to develop a critical sociology of work and employment. Triggered by the publication of Braverman’s *Labour and Monopoly Capital* in 1974, Labour Process Theory (LPT) has remained at the forefront of analysis exploring the changing dynamics of work and employment. Over four decades, LPT has demonstrated its analytical purchase and contemporary relevance, as evidenced in the annual International Labour Process Conference (ILPC) and the publication of numerous edited volumes and countless articles which embrace LPT as the key theoretical resource. In simple terms, labour process analysis has recognized the indeterminacy of labour as a ‘particular’ commodity through uncovering the mechanisms that transform the capacity to work into actual work (Smith and Thompson, 2009; Thompson and Newsome, 2004).

Attempts to provide a coherent framework and a degree of analytical integrity to labour process analysis have been facilitated by the construction of a ‘core theory’, based essentially on ideas rooted in Marx’s *Capital*. Most keenly developed by Thompson (1989; 1990), the core principles include, firstly, the fundamental idea that the labour process involves the generation of a surplus as the capacity for work (labour power) is transformed into concrete or actual work. It follows that the role of labour and the capital-labour relationship are analytically...
privileging developments at the point of production as a distinct site of analysis has been theorized predominantly by Edwards (1990; see also Hammer and Riisgaard in this volume). Edwards’ argument rests on the understanding that the labour process is ‘relatively autonomous’, in the sense that forces external to it are simultaneously mediated by internal forces. The implication is that similar external situations can produce different internal labour process outcomes because of the distinctiveness and peculiarities of particular workplaces. Thus, the patterns of control that emerge within the labour process depend in part on the activities of managers and workers in the immediate ‘effort-bargain’ (Edwards, 1990). The focus of so-called ‘second wave’ labour process theory (e.g. Burawoy, 1979; Edwards, 1979; Friedman, 1977) is particularly important, not least in the understanding of factory and workplace dynamics.

This emphasis on developments at the ‘point of production’ has been utilized as a framing device to demarcate the focus of labour process enquiry and subsequent research agendas. As Thompson (2010) has highlighted, the narrow version of core theory successfully prioritizes the labour process only to answer questions relevant to that sphere. Yet, this seemingly narrow dimension and the reach of labour process analysis remain ‘contested’ (Edwards, 2010). Aspects of contestation have revolved around the limitations of LPT in its ability to explain developments within points of production, most notably in relation to gender and race, as well as issues lying outside the workplace, such as non-wage labour, familial ideology and informality (see also chapters by Wong and Pegler in this volume). Attempts to position an understanding of the
dynamics of the labour process within a wider framework of changes at
the level of political economy have recently intensified.

The disjuncture between the dynamics of the labour process at
the point of production with the broader political economy shaping the
nature of contemporary production has been termed the ‘connectiv-
ity problem’. Recognition of this problem and attempts to redress it by
engaging with complementarily theoretical and explanatory resources
has become increasingly common for theorists of the labour process
(Smith and Thompson, 2009). The renewed case for LPT to work at mul-
tiple levels of analysis, thereby rendering more explicit the connections
between the dynamics of workplace transformation, political economy
and shifting regimes of accumulation, is compelling. In this respect,
then, the attempt to engage with the comparatively recent (in relation
to the longer history of LPT) theoretical resources and projects of GCCs,
GVCs and GPNs is consistent and apposite.

GCC, GVC and GPN

An extended review of Global Commodity Chain (GCCs), global value
chains (GVCs) and global production networks (GPNs) is not needed,
given the widespread dissemination of knowledge of these frameworks
from their respective heartlands in the world systems tradition, develop-
ment studies and economic and labour geography. Moreover, Bair pro-
vides a lucid account of the genealogy of commodity chains and value
chains (2008; 2009), while a number of key articles, which heralded the
distinctive variant of the GPN, are quite accessible to non-specialists (e.g.
Dicken et al., 2001; Henderson et al., 2002; Coe et al., 2004). Nevertheless,
comment is required in order to foreground our critical discussion of
labour, its agency and the labour process within what is, by now, an
extensive literature on global chains and networks of production.

Even though GCCs, GVCs and GPNs may be regarded as loosely
integrated traditions (Gibbon et al., 2008), using them interchangeably
might be problematic. Terminological variation (the chain or network
metaphor) does signify contrasting intellectual orientations, methods,
approaches and objects of study (Bair, 2005). Even when comparing
GCCs and GVCs, the contrasting acronyms signify distinctions in theo-
retical and disciplinary affinity, and in substantive emphases and empiri-
cal concerns, to describe ‘the sequence of processes by which goods and
services are conceived, produced and brought to market’ (Bair, 2009: 2).
In sum, then, notwithstanding similarities and overlap, the ‘acronym
soup’, to use Coe’s phrase, is meant to portend analytical difference, even if, in reality, variation among these frameworks is not nearly as clear at the level of empirical research.

Whatever their differences, it is instructive to recall briefly that each of the chain/network frameworks was striving to solve real-world problems, lest the bigger picture gets lost in the forensic examination of the difference between them. In essence, they share the common objective of describing and analysing the expanding and increasingly interconnected transnational systems of production (Dicken, 2011). As developing countries became important sites for basic manufacturing, GCC research was a way to map and analyse the changing geographies of different economic activities between and within the global North and South. Gereffi and colleagues’ original objective (see Gereffi et al., 1994)1 was to describe these functionally integrated and geographically dispersed systems of production, and the GCC approach had the great strength of permitting the highly abstract idea of globalization to be apprehended concretely in terms of relations organized around tangible commodities. In addition, because they focused on connections between particular territories and world markets, commodity chains proved attractive to development scholars, especially in light of the shift to export-oriented industrialization strategies in the South.

In early GCC formulations, Gereffi and colleagues focused on the unequal returns that accrued to chain participants, and the link between these outcomes and the different forms of control – or governance – exercised by the powerful firms that ‘drive’ commodity chains. Governance was understood to be a function of the type of lead firm found in a chain, with Gereffi proposing a central distinction between Producer Driven Commodity Chains (PDCC) and Buyer Driven Commodity Chains (BDCC). BDCCs, in particular, provoked considerable interest as they betokened novel forms of inter-firm linkages in the light manufacturing industries, associated with the internationalization and externalization of production to independent contractors and suppliers. Several early contributions to the expanding field of GCC research investigated the utility and applicability of Gereffi’s governance typology, with some scholars suggesting that the PDCC and BDCC categories failed to capture the range of governance forms in actual chains (Gereffi et al., 2005).

These assessments of the governance forms proposed in Gereffi’s GCC framework, and the growing interest in global production networks beyond Gereffi’s own discipline of sociology, gave rise to a second iteration – the theory of global value chains – in which questions of inter-firm or transactional (as opposed to ‘whole chain’) governance
assumed greater importance (cf. Ponte and Sturgeon, 2014). GVCs were conceived as ‘the set of inter-sectoral linkages between firms and other actors through which ... geographical and organisational reconfiguration has taken place’ (Gibbon et al., 2008: 318). If globalization was causing increased geographical dispersion and differentiation between places and actors, then GVCs were to be conceived of as the integrative counterpart to these processes. However, there is no doubting that the signal episode in the trajectory from GCC to a distinctive GVC approach was Gereffi et al.’s (2005) seminal article in Review of International Political Economy, in which they elaborate a theory that specifies the determinants of inter-firm governance types. Using three independent variables – knowledge and information complexity, the degree to which this information can be codified and thus transmitted more easily between parties, and the existing capacities or capabilities in the supply base – produces a typology of five possible governance forms: market, modular, relational, captive and hierarchy. In this typology, as value chains move from hierarchy to market, the level of explicit coordination and power asymmetry between exchange partners increases. As Bair has observed, governance as coordination (GVC) signified a disjunction from governance as ‘driving’ (GCC), narrowing the focus to the immediate dyadic links in a value chain (Bair, 2008). Gereffi et al. (2005) scaled down the concept of governance from a characteristic of an entire chain to a description of the mode of coordination prevailing at a particular link.

In response to the more constricted GVC, the GPN approach of the ‘Manchester school’ went in the other direction, claiming to restore a larger analytic picture. Global production activities should be conceived, not as vertical and linear sequences, but as highly complex networks, in which intricate horizontal, diagonal and vertical links formed multi-dimensional, multi-layered lattices of economic activity (Henderson et al., 2002). As is well known, GPN theory emphasized ‘the dialectics of global-local’ relations, for the principal reason that firm-centred production networks are deeply influenced by the concrete socio-political contexts in which they are embedded. GPN sought to restore the ‘territorial’ dimension of the specific locations comprising the nodes of global networks, emphasizing that institutional and regulatory contexts, and non-firm actors – especially the state – also shape the dynamics of production systems. In particular, they developed the notion of ‘strategic coupling’ (Coe et al., 2004) of global production networks with regional assets as a way to ‘tie down’ productive activities in a particular place. Three conceptual categories were identified as central to GPN analysis: value (how it is created, enhanced and captured);
power (how it is created and maintained within production networks); and how agents and structures are embedded in particular territories (Henderson et al., 2002).

As editors of this collection, and convenors of the conference stream that gave rise to it, we have consciously avoided advocating a particular approach. Instead, we encouraged contributing authors to work with what framework has most appropriately suited their analytical purposes, particularly in respect of the scalar level being addressed. We have not privileged one framework to the exclusion of another.

Nevertheless, certain limitations and strengths of the respective constructs must be recognized in the context of integrating LPT into studies of global production. GVC governance, at least as conceived by Gereffi et al. (2005), excessively narrows the analysis of chain dynamics to dyadic linkages in a value chain (Bair, 2008), obscuring or neglecting, in the interests of parsimony and intellectual rigour, how these linkages are embedded within the logics of and shifts in global capitalist political economy (Palpacuer, 2008; Werner and Bair, 2011; also Bair and Werner in this volume). Further, its flatter ontology hinders the development of an understanding of power asymmetries across chains. Indeed, the slicing-up of value chains has significant governance implications profoundly affecting the power relations between increasing numbers of actors in distant locales. However, the greatest weakness of the GVC remains its relative neglect of labour, both as a source of value or even as an object of chain dynamics (Taylor et al., 2013).

Conversely, the strengths of the GPN approach lie precisely in its broader scope, its multi-level scalarity, its greater spatial sensitivity, and its attempt to understand the dynamics and complexities of power relations between and among firm and non-firm actors. Further, the GPN framework has, despite qualifications, explicitly acknowledged the importance of labour among the territorial factors that give GPNs their structure, and shape their consequences for both global and local actors. Yet, the inclusivity of the GPN concept also proves to be a weakness, since it lacks a discrete research question of the sort that motivates the GVC governance theory, and, perhaps not surprisingly given the framework’s ambition, empirical analyses of GPNs do not necessarily deliver on the claims made by proponents of this approach. In this sense, it runs the risk of being too expansive, a totalizing theory lacking explanatory bite (Taylor, 2010), or ‘a theory of everything’, as Thompson et al. put it in their contribution to this volume. In the next section, we turn to a consideration of how each of these frameworks can more satisfactorily address questions about the labour process in the context of globalized production.
Addressing the Labour Deficit – Strengths, Limitations and Uncompleted Tasks

Smith et al. (2002) critiqued the literature on global chains for disregarding the social relations of production in favour of an over-prioritization of economic governance. While the flourishing literature on GPNs did then produce a growing awareness of the different forms of labour ‘enrolled into them’, to use Coe and Hess’s (2013: 5) phrase, it remained largely independent of a parallel literature on the impacts of global production systems on workers and their potential responses. For some, this neglect could be remedied only by making labour integral to an understanding of GPNs (Cumbers et al., 2008) in two senses: first, as ‘abstract labour’, that lies at the heart of all systems of commodity production (whether local or global) within capitalism and; second, as labour in specific collective organizational forms (trade unions) representing workers within systems of production. Relatedly, other economic geographers have highlighted the difference between labour’s structural power and its associational power (e.g. Coe and Jordus-Lier, 2011; Selwyn, 2011; 2013), concepts first formulated by Wright (2000). Structural power, derived from workers’ position in the production process, can be distinguished from their associational power, based on their collective organization to extract meaningful concessions from the state and/or capital. In a similar vein, Thompson et al. (this volume) neatly contrasts labour power with labour’s power. Nevertheless, the idea of associational power has benefited from labour geography’s growing acknowledgement of labour agency – of workers, their organizations and activity within GPNs.

Unpacking Labour Agency

A brief retrospective helps explain the recent attention paid to labour agency. The Marxist economic geography of the 1980s, which emphasized capital-labour relations (Harvey, 1982; Massey, 1984; Storper and Walker, 1989), generally characterized workers as an oppressed class, incapable of shaping the geographies of the capitalist system through their collective action (Coe and Jordus-Lier, 2011). The reaction was to privilege workers’ capacity to create their own economic geographies (Herod, 2001), in which labour adopted multi-scalar strategies to challenge the growing power of global capital (Castree et al., 2004). While an important corrective to treating labour in purely objective terms, the championing of labour agency, in turn, stimulated a critique, still
ongoing, of the limitations of this approach. Several strands stood out initially: the tendency to amplify (if not exaggerate) the highpoints of workers’ triumphs (Coe, 2013; see Cumbers in this volume), disabling a more sober but realistic assessment of labour’s weaknesses; an emphasis on groups of strong workers with the capacity to leverage concessions from capital; and a conflation of trade union activity with labour agency in general (Lier, 2007). Along these lines, it is difficult to ignore the irony that that this efflorescence of a labour geography avowing worker action and labour capacity has occurred in a period of working class retreat and the erosion of international trade unionism.

It is widely acknowledged that ‘labour agency’ as a concept has been under-theorized (Castree, 2010) and that its usage had simply come to mean any meaningful manifestation of collective worker activity. Certainly, efforts to deconstruct agency have been welcome. Cumbers et al. (2010) and others have utilized Katz’s (2004) distinction between resilience (everyday coping practices), reworking (efforts to materially improve conditions), the principal sense in which agency has been used within labour geography, and resistance (direct challenges to capitalist social relations). While helpful heuristically, this categorization is not so robust analytically, failing to capture the multi-layered nature of ‘labour’s power’ and exercise, and the nature of collective organization.

Reworking, for instance, may be tightly entwined with quotidian resilience,8 their combined ‘agential’ impact on global capital being greater than the sum of their constituent elements. In short, diminishing the significance of resilience may be misplaced.9

An ancillary criticism of these attempts to deconstruct agency is that, existing at a level of abstraction, they fall short of the rigour needed for concrete explanation of collective agency within GPNs. In this regard, knowledge might be required of important contexts and factors including the type, nature and structure of union(s) involved in one or more geographies, multiple institutional characteristics including the organizational mechanisms for generating international action and solidarity, union membership densities, the degree of managerial acceptance/opposition, employers’ strategies and orientations, the processes and outcomes of bargaining and so on. In short what needs to be included is a more finely grained scalar and organizational analysis of employment relations that is not reducible to the beguiling but vague categorizations of resilience, reworking or resistance. This is not to reject the utility of these categories in toto, but to suggest that they are work in progress, requiring further elaboration. For example, the interconnections between resilience, reworking and resistance as labour agency ‘strategies’ may benefit from the application of mobilization
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theory (e.g. Kelly, 1998) and its key stages (grievance, attribution, mobilization, organization), helping us to understand the dynamics of transnational (across GPNs) as well as local or nationally based labour action.

Further qualification has been made of the tendency to champion worker agency for its own sake, not least the need to create an ‘analytical space’ for individual, as well as collective, action. Parenthetically, LPT has engaged with similar themes through its exploration of identity and interests (Marks and Thompson, 2010). Reflecting on other ‘subject positions’, beyond those of the worker and union member, leads to a consideration of the intersections between forms of social difference, including class, gender, race and ethnicity, to wider labour agencies (e.g. migration, community unionism) and even to the realm of social reproduction. Bezuidenhout and Buhlungu (2011: 257) stretch the definitional boundaries of worker agency to the ‘informal or formal, individual or collective, spontaneous or goal oriented, sporadic or sustained [which] can operate on different scales’. Nevertheless, the danger of such definitional promiscuity is that it can lead to analytical relativism, blunting our ability to distinguish the inconsequential from the meaningful. We do need to have a sense of what matters most, what worker actions and organizations have the ability to alter the shape and dynamic of chains by impacting the decision-making of lead firms, their suppliers, the state (at local and national levels) and regulatory bodies.

Hence, the most significant qualification to the unrestrained celebration of worker agency lies in understanding how ‘labour’s power’ and, as argued below, labour power, are embedded within transnational, national and local spheres of production. If labour needed to be ‘written in’ to the script and have its agency restored, it does not follow that capital and its agency, the transnational firm and the state, should be written out. The fragmented, but tightly coordinated, organization of global capital structurally constrains and conditions labour agency in multiple ways. The spatial and functional reconfigurations of value-added activities may inhibit associational power and pose major challenges for labour (Mosley, 2011). Indeed, outsourcing and offshoring invariably deliver a double whammy of disintermediation that can undermine organized labour in the global North and exacerbate difficulties for building collective worker organization in the global South (see Taylor and Bain, 2008 for the example of call centres). One does not have to accept that subcontracting is a universal paradigm (Wills, 2009) to acknowledge its deleterious impacts on labour’s terms and conditions and the exercise of effective agency.
Social Upgrading

Parallel to the discussion of labour agency in the GPN literature, labour has been brought into GVCs and GPNs via the vis-à-vis the problematic of upgrading. Scholars from the field of Development Studies challenged earlier GCC and GVC formulations for either neglecting to consider the position of workers, or for depicting them merely as an endogenous factor of production at the bottom of value chains. The broader problem is that when attention is focused on dyadic relations between, say, buyers and suppliers, and the degree to which these facilitate firm-level upgrading, the experience and interests of labour tend to be subsumed within a consideration of the position of suppliers. The work of Barrientos and colleagues and others (e.g. Palpacuer, 2008) has been influential in analytically distinguishing between economic and social upgrading, and diagnosing why the former does not automatically produce the latter (Barrientos et al., 2011; Milberg and Winkler, 2011). There is no shortage of examples of failed social upgrading. An appalling case is that of the Taiwanese Foxconn factories in China, where an oppressive dormitory employment regime, inhumane working conditions and oppressive managerial practices led to enormous worker discontent, culminating in a spate of attempted and successful suicides in factories producing for Apple, Nokia and other leading electronics brands (Chan, 2013; Chan et al., 2013).

Barrientos et al. (2011) argue that it is necessary to capture the different dimensions of labour within value chains analysis. It should include labour as a productive factor (where the commercial driver is quality standards and not only cost pressures) and labour as socially embedded, in which labour standards, rights, ILO conventions and human rights can and should play a role. The emergence of this social upgrading concept constitutes a promising development in that it raises the issue of how to achieve improved conditions. However, its principal analytical weakness lies in the fact that the capitalist imperatives of cost-minimization and profit-maximization in fiercely competitive global markets operating at the level of the firm level and beyond (e.g. local labour regime) may thwart, neutralize or trump interventions ostensibly designed to improve conditions, such as codes of practice, multilateral initiatives (ILO and OECD guidelines) or government legislation (see Mayer and Pickles, 2010; Barrientos et al., 2011: 337; Anner et al., 2013). The framing of value chain participation and firm-level upgrading as a ‘win-win’ scenario that emphasizes mutual gains for TNCs and workers may well be illusory, especially when the responsibility, ultimately, for reforming practices lies with the
voluntary actions of firms themselves. Social upgrading and how it can be achieved are important questions and are addressed in this volume by Anner and Pegler.

**Labour Power and the Labour Process**

We now turn to consider structural power, labour power and the labour process more fully. There is justification for this conceptual linkage. Structural power, to reprise, focuses on workers’ position in the productive process. Labour power is the capacity to labour, which only becomes real as concrete labour when set in motion by the owners (or controllers) of the means of production, through the labour process (Marx, 1976: chapters 6–7). Thus, both structural power and labour power can be distinguished from associational power, which is concerned principally with workers’, particularly unions’, activity and their ability to exploit their ‘positionality’. The labour process can be seen to involve a dual agency, by capital in its assembling, organizing and controlling of workers in order to ensure that surplus labour can be extracted and, by labour itself, as it acts to create that surplus (value). Thus, LPT recognizes and is centrally focused on the indeterminacy of labour – labour as the peculiar commodity – and seeks to reveal and analyse the mechanisms that convert the potential to work into actual work. The purpose of this exegesis is to call attention to the fact that labour agency in these related senses has been (relative to associational power) underexplored.

Some have highlighted the need to overcome this deficit even though it remains a challenge to execute empirically. For Rainnie *et al.* (2011), GPNs are as much systems of embodied labour as they are interlinked systems of firms and, consequently, ‘labour, as the ultimate source of value … must lie at [GPNs’] heart’ (161). For Cumbers *et al.* (2008), as indicated, abstract labour is the key to all systems of commodity production.11 For Riisgaard and Hammer (2011: 186), ‘labour needs to be conceptualised *a priori* as a value producer in GVCs and thus as a social actor with its own interests regarding the organisational, spatial and political structure of a value chain’.

Coe and colleagues (see this volume) and others have undoubtedly taken significant steps towards formulating ‘an expanded GPN’ that has workers and their collective organizations centre stage and not merely as an add-on. Nevertheless, a labour process deficit remains. To be sure, workers are ‘not simply a production input’ (Coe *et al.*, 2008), but if the ‘production input’ of conventional economics is re-theorized through
the lens of labour process analysis, then it assumes a far greater salience for the sphere of production in GPN analysis. Some questions suggest themselves. To what extent are differing control mechanisms appropriate for, and used by, lead firms and/or suppliers at the different stages of a value chain/production network? What contrasting mechanisms for leveraging surplus and for ensuring the creation of value, ironically missing from value chain theory (Gibbon et al., 2008; Taylor, 2010), are utilized in the different places? Beyond the transactions costs and inter-firm governance, in what ways is concrete labour in the multiple locations and worksites connected – a question that invokes Marx's concept of the collective worker, or Glucksmann's (2005) total social organization of labour.

For all its many strengths, the expanded, labour-integrated version of the GPN understates the importance of the workplace as a key site for the extraction of surplus. Given the catholic nature of recent labour geography, its intellectual openness to diverse disciplines and research agendas, this general oversight is perhaps surprising. One would have expected more to have been written on management control strategies, labour indeterminacy, the immediate wage-effort bargain and worker responses at the workplace level, all core concerns of LPT as indicated in Part II. To provide an illustration of what is missing, it may be helpful to draw the contrast between the notions of the local labour regime and that of the workplace regime. While the local labour regime, and its role in mediating inter-firm governance, is extensively explored in the labour geography and GPN literature, the workplace regime is notable for its absence.

The intention here is not to narrow the labour process to the workplace alone but to maintain that an emphasis on the point(s) of production or service delivery – or at least their inclusion in a broader theorizing of structural and associational power and agency – has analytical validity. Driven by firms’ incessant restructuring and relocation strategies, GPNs are constantly evolving, spatially variable divisions of labour that involve the creation of new or the transformation of existing places of work. As Smith and Meiksins (1995: 261) have argued, within the broader cross-national variation of management style, industrial relations, technological capability and so on, ‘factory regimes and the labour process [are] particularly dynamic and variegated’. In fact, the slicing-up – or stretching – of chains or networks across space may throw into sharper relief the inescapable problematic for capital of overcoming labour indeterminacy. What mechanisms of control are adopted by lead firms to ensure the transformation of labour power in and across the geographically distant workplaces?
Recent research, first presented at the International Labour Process Conference,\textsuperscript{13} provides examples of how LPT can be utilized to conceptualize such differences. Feuerstein (2013) identifies contrasting strategies of management control, respectively responsible autonomy and direct control (Friedman, 1977), in two variants of the offshored Indian IT industry. The evidence challenges the notion of industry-wide uniformity and the dominance of a single type of workplace regime, while emphasizing the contingency of work organization and the variability of workplace control. Pawlicki (2013) demonstrates how a German software engineering firm in its Global Design Network (GDN) intermingled autonomy and control strategies at its nearshore site in Bucharest, Romania.

Then, there is the ‘connectivity’ problem (Smith and Thompson, 2009; Thompson and Smith, 2010), of how the dynamics of core labour process theory are embedded within or, related to, a wider framework of change at the scale of the global political economy. In the edited collection on labour process theory, Taylor (2010) analysed how the macro and the micro might be articulated through the meso level of GVC coordination and GPN networks in his study of globalized call centres. Similarly and subsequently, Rainnie \textit{et al}. (2011) urged labour process analysis ‘to engage with a more sophisticated form of analysis of inter-firm relationships, value creating and capture’, advice reflected in a number of chapters in this volume, which analyse the causal connections between macro level political economy and the labour process at the micro level of the workplace.

While certain LPT theorists favour financialization as a designation for, and as a means of, understanding, the contemporary macro political economy (e.g. Thompson, 2003; Thompson \textit{et al}. in this volume), others, although acknowledging the significance of financialization and its effects, have preferred to integrate it with the broader concept of global neoliberal capitalism. Some labour geographers have even drawn labour process implications from their interpretation of the macro to micro mechanisms of neoliberalism. Kelly (2010: 171), for example, sees the global capitalist system as containing ‘internal logics that require the constant intensification of labour and production processes, an ever-decreasing turnover time for capital to generate profit and an incessant restructuring that finds new technological, regulatory and spatial arrangements for production’. Nevertheless, it is perhaps surprising, given these critical understandings of the ‘connectivities’ of neoliberal capitalism that, despite exceptions (Taylor \textit{et al}., 2014), little work still has directly engaged with the labour process, work organization and workplace consequences of the 2007–2008 crisis and subsequent global recession.\textsuperscript{14}
This introductory essay has argued that the focus on labour agency should not eclipse the broader conditions that shape labour’s ‘positional-ity’, to use the currently fashionable term. Associational power should not automatically be privileged at the expense of the structural, for weakness in labour’s structural power may well undermine its capacity to generate associational power, particularly in geographically stretched, sliced-up and outsourced value chains. Equally, labour’s structural position may confer certain potential advantages, such as the so-called ‘choke points’ within the highly integrated, just-in-time systems of production and service delivery (Bonacich and Wilson, 2008). As labour geography has emphasized in its unpacking of labour agency, there is a need to reconnect worker agency with the variable, spatialized dynamics of capital accumulation that condition labour’s structural power. Such generalized insight is invaluable, but analytical leverage will most likely follow a rigorous, highly concrete and geographically sensitive examination of structural power, associational power, labour agency and the labour process.

The terrain has changed greatly from the time when a general injunction to researchers in the fields of work and employment studies to adopt spatiality and make the geographical turn was pertinent (Herod et al., 2007; Rainnie et al., 2007). The theoretical landscape has widened as many working in the tradition of labour process analysis have adopted the diverse frameworks of global value chains (GVCs) and global production networks (GPNs). It is heartening that, rather than fighting framework wars, many researchers have appropriately drawn on the expanded conceptual toolkits provided both by GVCs, such as the specification of governance as related to complexity, codification and capabilities (Gereffi et al., 2005), and by GPNs, such as the emphasis on embeddedness and strategic coupling, when ‘putting labour in’ to space, scale and place. The chapters in this book exemplify the ways in which work at the frontier of labour and global production adopts and adapts the diverse formulations of global chains and networks.

The great majority of the chapters collected here originated as papers presented at the 31st International Labour Process Conference, which was held in March 2013 at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, New Jersey. We recognize that this conference stream and the resulting volume represent only the beginnings of a theoretical and empirical engagement between labour process theory and analysis and global value chains and networks. In the light of this observation, and because it is customary in the edited collections resulting from the labour process conference to comment on what kind of future research agenda might proceed from the volume’s theme, we offer a few (by no means
definitive or exhaustive) thoughts on possible directions that this emergent engagement might take. Theoretically, much still needs to be done regarding the fundamental questions of value and labour power. Mainstream GVC theory frequently operates with an orthodox formulation of value as valued-added, and while GPN has been concerned with value capture and creation, its position vis-à-vis labour as the source of value in global production remains undeveloped. Arguably, the intellectual challenge of the GCC/GVC/GPN project has stimulated renewed interest in essential questions that at one time dominated LPT, notably the labour theory of value.

The question of ‘connectivity’ has arisen in a number of the chapters, including Thompson, Cox and Parker’s notable attempt to construct a post-GVC framework. The articulations between the broader global political economy, capital accumulation, markets, firm-level strategies, labour process, labour power, the workplace and labour’s power are self-evidently important. Such articulation involves much more than the capital-labour duality, including particularly the role of the state at all levels. The editors willingly acknowledge that this volume is deficient in this important respect and emphasize that the state should be prominent in future labour process–inspired global chain or network research.

Of course, a single volume will be unable to encompass all of the pertinent conceptual questions and research areas, especially given the supply-side nature of the conference paper and publication process. Although constrained by the fact of submission, a collective mea culpa may not be entirely inappropriate when it comes to issues of gender, race, ethnicity and migration. We might have done more to solicit contributions in these inescapably important areas of global production and labour. This is a critical lacuna which we hope future scholarship will fill.

**Structure of the Book**

The book is divided into three parts. The first part, ‘Integrating Labour Process and Value Chains’, includes chapters that combine theoretical development and conceptual insight with empirical research that elucidates the interrelationships between the labour process, labour process theory and value chain analysis. The chapters develop and render more transparent the interrelationships between core labour process theory and global value chains/production networks. The chapter by Newsome draws on the notion of ‘value in motion’ to explore the critical role retail logistics plays in contributing to the value creation within overall production networks. It explores how the struggle between logistics
companies and retailers impacts on the labour process. The theoretical insights that can be gained from re-integrating labour and labour power with the articulated relations between production, distribution and exchange are explored.

Extending the concern to integrate labour process analysis with GVC perspectives, the chapter by Thompson, Parker and Cox explores issues of control and value capture faced by small and medium-sized producers of digital entertainment products. A model of value capture is developed that goes beyond complexity of information exchange, codifiability of the production process and competence of the supplier base, in part by incorporating labour power – value inputs, agency and impacts – fully into the framework.

The following chapter by Haidinger and Flecker also explores the capacity of LPT to deliver insight, in this case into parcel delivery services as part of a global logistics sector. It explores labour’s structural power resulting from the sector’s position in the supply chain. The case for extending the territory of prevailing labour process analysis to reflect how the social relations of production are integrated into the global economy along different trajectories is advanced in the chapter by Hammer and Riisgaard. They argue this process is based on new dynamics of segmentation and variegated relations between the formal and informal sectors. The final chapter in this part, by Wong, also reflects on the concern to incorporate informality into labour process analysis. By interrogating the articulation of informal labour in the e-waste value chain, this chapter highlights the distinctive and irreducible significance of informal labour to the functioning of value chains. It also underscores the relative lacuna on informal labour in labour process and value chain analysis.

The second part, ‘Unpacking Labour: Power, Agency and Standards’, complements the first in that it deconstructs and re-appraises the category of labour. Chapters consider labour as agency, labour as a source of power and labour as central to the capacity for social upgrading. The chapter by Bair and Werner maps the literature on GPN and labour by identifying two main streams and the key questions motivating each. The first perspective includes a voluminous literature on labour as object, documenting how global production arrangements affect the conditions of employment and other labour outcomes of particular groups of workers. The second stream centres labour as agent, asking what role, collectively and individually, workers play in shaping GPNs. They criticize both of these approaches for a ‘network essentialism’ which delimits the analysis of labour to those processes illuminated by the chain construct, and potentially confuses the ‘trees’ of global
value chains with the ‘forest’ of a capitalist world economy that cannot be reduced to the network configurations traced in the GVC and GPN literatures.

The role of workers in shaping global production networks (GPN) is explored in the chapter by Cumbers. He develops a conceptualization of the complex geographies of trade union action by using and extending the GPN framework, arguing for the importance of developing the, as yet unrealized, potential of a GPN framework for understanding labour’s predicament. The following chapter by Anner draws on evidence from the global value chain for apparel to explore domestic and transnational sources of worker power. He argues that the international restructuring of employment relations dynamics through global value chains (GVCs) necessitates a reconceptualization of worker power that is sensitive to the difference between micro (firm) level sources of worker power and macro level (national and international) sources of worker power in GVCs. The final chapter in this part by Coe also seeks to advance the theorization of labour agency within global production networks (GPNs), specifically via a focus on the uneven geographies and temporalities of labour agency within GPNs.

The third part, ‘Sectoral Studies’, provides cutting-edge, theoretically informed empirical studies of specific industrial sectors. Jenkins explores the grass-roots organizing activities taking place at the bottom of garment and electrical value chains in India. This chapter raises issues of community and gender and the associated challenges involved in mobilizing new and vulnerable constituencies of labour to resist exploitation at the local level. The following chapter by Pegler aims to expand our understanding of the impacts of value chain inclusion on labour from a social sustainability perspective. It focuses on the tasks and subjectivities of Amazonian flood plain peasants (ribeirinhos) who collect a new ‘wonder fruit’, açaí, for sale to an expanding market.

Shifting gears to a high-tech sector, Bergvall-Kåreborn and Howcroft examine the highly complex network structure of Apple’s GPN, directing particular attention to issues of value, power and embeddedness. Reporting on fieldwork with software developers in Sweden, the UK and the US, their chapter explains how the applications offered to Apple’s consumers are developed via a crowdsourcing model that has proved integral to the success of the company’s business model and ongoing expansion.

The next chapter by Rainnie, Herod, Pickren and McGrath-Champ introduces the concept of ‘wasted labour’ as a way to integrate issues of waste, particularly e-waste, into our understanding of work and employment in GPNs. The authors propose Global Destruction Network (GDN)
framework, which highlights the centrality of the labour process in the form and function of these circuits. The final chapter by Taylor draws on longitudinal evidence, over two decades, from the global call/contact centre sector. He argues that the call/contact centre can only be understood through the analytical integration of the dynamics of political economy, technological innovation, spatial and locational dimensions and, crucially, the qualities of labour. Theoretically, the chapter contributes by focusing on the indeterminacy of labour and the labour process in the contradiction between labour mobility and fixity at national and transnational scale.

In short, this collection inaugurates what we hope will be a sustained engagement between labour process analysis, labour geography and the study of global value chains/global production networks. In assessing the field of labour geography, Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2011: 216) declare their commitment to developing strategies capable of shifting the status quo in favour of workers, an objective shared by the editors and by contributors. Recalling the anti-capitalist, labour emancipatory outlook of early labour process theory and Labour Process Conferences reaffirms our conviction that the collective project this book represents is not solely theory-building for its own sake, important though this undoubtedly is. Rather, as a scholarly community we are fundamentally concerned with producing greater knowledge of the workings of global capitalism in order to deepen our ability to articulate alternative futures and mechanisms of change. Therefore, further research on labour agency is vital, particularly that which addresses, in concrete ways and not as empty rhetoric, the ways in which the structural power of workers can be made manifest in associational power.

Notes

1 Gereffi and Korzeniewicz’s (1994) volume is commonly held to be the founding document of the GCC tradition yet, as Bair (2005) has demonstrated, a ‘disjuncture’ between the earlier World Systems tradition of commodity chain research and the GCC framework was in evidence.

2 Bair (2009) has observed that World Systems Theory did place an emphasis on labour but that although based in this theory GCC tended to deal only indirectly with the impact on labour from BDCCs.

3 These terms have been widely cited. However, it should be noted en passant that Wright (2000) had very little to say about structural power – a mere three references in but one paragraph, and his employment of associational power is at a high level of abstraction.
4 However beguiling the structural power/associational power binary, its utility is more metaphorical than analytical. Both terms/concepts still require conceptual refinement and elaboration.

5 Coe and Hess (2013) emphasize the growing overlap between GPN scholarship and research areas that prioritize labour agency – particularly labour geography – and cite the edited collections of Bergene et al. (2010) and McGrath-Champ et al. (2010). This latter excellent collection, in common with a broader literature, certainly does entwine labour, work GCC, CVC and GPN, but contains only a few references to key GVC or GPN scholars, including Bair, Coe, Gereffi or Dicken, and explicitly to these frameworks.

6 An interesting intellectual parallel is that Braverman’s (1974) seminal work on the capitalist labour process similarly treats workers as object.

7 It might be suggested again, in parallel to the trajectory of LPT, that ‘second wave’ LPT (e.g. Friedman, 1977; Burawoy, 1979) attempted to correct the missing object although the worker subject was not as emphatically re-inserted as in much of labour geography.

8 To be fair, Coe and Jordhus-Lier (2011: 216) concede that it is necessary to be sensitive to the possible connections between the different strategies.

9 Many illustrations could be advanced, but the following has particular salience for labour process analysis and because it involved spatially imaginative labour activity across the GPN of a transnational corporation. In the prolonged British Airways dispute (2009–2011), cabin crew and their union BASSA (British Airways Stewards and Stewardesses Association) undertook collective action (including 21 strike days) to defend terms and conditions in an archetypal reworking strategy, according to Katz’s typology. However, research reveals deep roots of collective action as embedded in workers’ coping ‘strategies’ and the daily union defence of their workplace (in-flight) ‘frontiers of control’ against managerial incursions (Taylor and Moore, 2015).

10 The simple counter-position of business unionism with community unionism, common in labour geography, fails to capture the complex typologies of unions, extent of member activity and politics.

11 See Thompson et al. (this volume) for a critique of Cumbers et al.’s (2008) and of Selwyn’s (2011) tendency to define GVCs or GPNs principally as labour control regimes.

12 The use of the term ‘strategies’ may attribute to firms’ decision-making a sense of long-range planning and purpose that its tactical and reactive nature does not merit. Capital’s ‘spatial fix’ (Harvey, 1982) in the abstract cannot be seamlessly translated into corporate decisions to reconfigure and relocate.
13 The articles by Feuerstein (2013) and Pawlicki (2013) were first presented as papers to a special stream similarly entitled ‘Putting Labour in its Place: Global Value Chains and Labour Process Analysis’ at the 30th International Labour Process Conference in Stockholm (27–29 March 2012) and were selected for publication in a special issue of *Competition and Change*, volume 17, issue 1.

14 Some attempts have been made to consider the impacts on value chains from a development perspective (e.g. Cattaneo *et al.*, 2010).

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