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Back to the factory: the continuing salience of industrial workplace history

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ABSTRACT

Factories remain significant sites of employment, crucial to capitalism. In the twentieth century, scholars registered achievements in documenting their history, but since the late 1980s, and for a generation, the field lost impetus within labour history although insights continued to accumulate through work in adjacent disciplines. The factory has not featured on the agenda of 'transnational' and 'global' labour history, but we suggest that it can and should contribute to that broader global project, reinvigorating labour history, not least by contributing a dimension close to workers' everyday experience.

'Accompanied by Mr. Moneybags and by the possessor of labour-power, we therefore take leave for a time of this noisy sphere, where everything takes place on the surface and in view of all men, and follow them both into the hidden abode of production, on whose threshold there stares us in the face "No admittance except on business." Here we shall see, not only how capital produces, but how capital is produced. We shall at last force the secret of profit making.'

-Karl Marx. *Capital* (1978, p.167).

Introduction

Historical writing frequently reflects the concerns of the era in which it is written. We argue for the factory's continued relevance to capitalism during the recent wave of globalisation, and therefore of its history. We review previous historians' achievements, show how they have been built on by those of the 21st century and argue for integrating the factory history tradition into the growing corpus of work adopting transnational and global perspectives. By factory history, we understand the historical study of sizeable fixed industrial sites either individually or collectively.

The factory and the industrial worker once loomed large in national historiographies, the former as the emblematic locus of industrialization, the latter as a collective historical agent engendering progressive change through industrial action. The industrial plant nurtured what Marx considered capitalism's core: the relations of production on the shop floor. The large Fordist factory constituted a central political and cultural reference point for policymakers, employers and organized labour. Labour historians valued factory history. However, since the 1980s, de-industrialization and factory relocation has characterized western economies. Social scientists contend that manufacturing has little contemporary resonance and the once-emphasized industrial working class is now considered

a marginal phenomenon. This thinking was linked to a questionable political-ideological narrative predicated on the shift to a 'knowledge economy'. Factories are allegedly no longer central to policy decisions, electoral programmes or social protest. Better-grounded are assertions that industrial trade unions and industrial labour have waned in strength. But, in a world awash with manufactured goods, factories have not disappeared. Nor have they lost their relevance to capitalism.

Manufacturing persists in developed economies and is expanding in many 'developing' countries. Sporadically, as with the Rana Plaza disaster and the worker suicides in Chinese multi-nationals, factories and workers reached the western public's awareness in the twenty-first century. The relocation of industrial production created more factory jobs in developing economies without entirely destroying them in the developed world. Enormous Fordist factories arose in China. The Taiwanese multinational company Foxconn established workshops in Central and Eastern Europe, a region which has become the electronics industry's second-tier global location, just behind East Asia (Andrijasevic & Sacchetto, 2013 and 2014). The factory as a model of production organisation has been adopted within the service sector (call centres) and logistics and distribution (warehouses) where workers are highly regimented and their activities constantly measured against metric performance standards, provoking arguments that they constitute present-day 'Satanic mills' (Bain & Taylor, 2000). These workplaces adopt historic Taylorist practices, such as the use of technology to control the pace of work and the fragmentation and mechanization of tasks to raise productivity while deskilling workers. Manufacturing has increased as a proportion of GDP of many middle-income developing economies and is central to their 'development' despite their allegedly decreased ability to boost economic growth (Haraguchi, Fang Chin Cheng, & Smeets, 2017). More widely, the factory nexus in transnationally-networked value chains is vital to how global capitalism connects distant localities and people into integrated processes. Now that scholarship is revisiting themes of class, inequality and political economy in the context of global economic crisis and its aftermath, reviving factory history and connecting the micro with the macro appears imperative.

Initial historiography and its achievements

There is a rich patrimony of research on factories which is rooted in fields adjacent to labour history, of which many historians have long been aware. Elton Mayo conducted the renowned American Hawthorne study in the 1920s and 1930s within a social psychology framework (Mayo, 1933 and 1949). The 'human relations school' regarded the factory as a closed social system and analysed workshop behaviour in terms of workers` productive relations. By the 1940s, anthropologically-informed studies of individual factories appeared, initially due to the British state's wartime concern with production. In the UK, Mass Observation (MO) conducted an ethnographic study of a war factory, depicting its social relations in detail, emphasising gender relations to reflect on issues of women's morale that interested the wartime state (1943). British industrial anthropology and sociology expanded during the 1940s and 50s. Subsequent analyses covered several themes, from status hierarchies and relations among workers and managers to union-management interaction, from the integration of racial/ethnic groups to workers on the line and work flow (Holzberg & Giovannini, 1981). Eight Manchester shop floor studies attempted to conceptualize the workshop as an articulation point in wider society rather than as an isolated social system. The work had four points of departure: the multiplicity of social positions and identities on the shop floor; the workshop's relationship to its external social context; major societal patterns; and the position of women in domestic settings. These studies emphasized the interrelationships between sex, race, class and the productive system (Cunnison, 1982).

The Manchester shop floor studies' main methodological innovation lay in the way they handled the interactions between the factory's internal life and its external context. Dissatisfied with conceptualizing role systems simply as overlapping and interactive, Emmett and Morgan employed Erving Goffman`s notion of a 'semi-permeable membrane' to explain the mechanisms through which the external world relates to the social world of the factory in the production of social difference. The

strength of this conceptualization lies in its recognition of the factory as a social terrain where changes in the external social world undergo a transformation to 'serve purposes peculiar to the workplace and interaction in it' (Emmett & Morgan, 1982, p. 156). Reflecting on these methodological approaches from a labour process theory perspective, Paul Edwards later defined workplace mechanisms as 'relatively autonomous forces' with varying degrees of autonomy obtaining between workplaces and across time (Edwards, 1990).

From the late 1960s onwards, factory studies advanced into analysing the dynamics of small-group behaviour, 'factory culture' and its informal and formal organizations (Holzberg & Giovannini, 1981, pp.321–8). In the UK, industrial relations scholars built on this work to create highly differentiated and dynamic studies of relations between managers, shop stewards and workers (Batstone, Boraston, & Frenkel, 1979). Governments and the New Left paid increasing attention to the origins, dynamics, organisation and consequences of shop floor conflict. The conceptualization of industrial conflict beyond its overt, organised expressions, the diversity of its forms and the attention given to apparently trivial disputes and struggles entailed concretising and refining generalised and abstract conceptions of workplace conflict and class struggle. In contrast to what Robert Frankenberg (1982) called 'a managerial approach' (Emmett & Morgan, 1982, p.161), the centrality of low-level but persistent conflict such as that depicted by Batstone, Boraston and Frenkel in their classic study *Shop Stewards in Action* incorporated the daily experiences of workers and their representatives, to compose a far more complex picture. Simplistic accounts of workers' collective organisation were rendered obsolete. Anthropologically-informed conceptualizations of power relations and their micro-level dynamics had entered the study of the workplace through experience-near analysis of the production process and its social setting.

Historical research was nurtured by such contemporary approaches to the factory. Some historical studies of factories took them as instances of broader trends. Others were informed by sophisticated frameworks synthesising such dimensions as material conditions in the workplace with dynamic gendered and sociological perspectives on management-worker relations. Three studies of war industry show what was achieved. Gerhard Meissl's 1975 thesis on the evolution of social relations in the huge Austrian imperial munitions factory at Wöllersdorf during the First World War majored on women's material and social experiences of work and especially of their health and safety in an exceptionally hazardous part of war industry (Meißl, 1975). Another important study by Gerd Wysocki focused on the Salzgitter factory *Reichswerk Hermann Goering*, part of the largest German Second World War production complex appeared in 1982 (Wysocki, 1982). It deals with the concern's mid-war takeover of Soviet productive assets and its consequences. It also confronts issues of 'free' and unfree labour's relationships. Relations between German employees, migrant workers, Soviet POW slave labourers, management and the on-site concentration camp are all dealt with in detail. In the same year, Richard Croucher's *Engineers at War 1939–45* (1982) analysed factory-level interactions between the state, managements, women, young workers and political activists, reinstating work groups and politics to the history of growing industrial conflict in wartime Britain's arms industries. All three of these works' largely national and wartime contexts drew on extensive archival bases, and they stand comparison with more recent works in terms of their highly differentiated visions of social relations.

Factory history outside of these West European contexts was a very different phenomenon, since its orientations and assessments were typically heavily influenced by Stalinist politics. Pre-1989, eastern bloc historians built a body of research on factory history limited to a predictably 'party' and teleological frame which nevertheless created a sizeable empirical base. Through its sheer volume, it impresses while simultaneously evoking Paul Thompson`s warnings against the simple accumulation of empiricist plant studies, as part of his defence of labour process theory's relevance. Following Marx and Lenin, factories were objects of great veneration under 'state socialist' regimes, featuring ideologized 'heroes of (industrial) work' (Rutar, 2014, p. 46). In the GDR, the once thriving genre of the 'factory monograph' ('Betriebsgeschichte') was promoted by the prominent working-class historian Jürgen Kuczynski, whose work become well-known in the West. In 1977, the GDR had

some 1800 'company history commissions' involving more than 20,000 members including professional scholars, party activists and workers (Lindenberger, 2018). Their products emphasized material conditions under capitalism, side-stepping the real problems faced by workers under 'state socialism'. This tradition of studying factories under 'state socialism' was later revisited in more sociological, creative and imaginative ways which reflected different national cultural and political traditions (Heumos, 2010). This new generation of labour and social historians has returned to the site of the 'socialist factory' to address a multitude of previously neglected questions (Archer & Musić, 2017; Brunnbauer, Nonaj, & Raeva, 2013; Cucu, forthcoming; Mazurek, 2005; Miljković, 2017; Tóth, 2005). Impressive results have accumulated and a new picture begins to emerge (Grama & Zimmermann, 2018, pp.8–9).

In the west, historians continued to advocate, theorise and develop their own, very different variety of factory history. In 1978, Jeremy Brecher (1978), who might be characterised as a radical or New Left labour historian, wrote 'Uncovering the Hidden History of the American Workplace', a research manifesto indicative of a certain paradigm (of which Brecher was simply a disseminator) of factory-based historical research. Brecher posited that studying the factory as workplace meant studying the relations between managers and workers, and how technology, bureaucracy and ideologies were mobilised in that struggle. He thought of the factory as a space where 'working people and capitalists confronted each other,' and thus unwittingly directed historians' gaze towards the relations of production on the shop floor and away from other aspects. In Brecher's words, 'The actual history of the workplace […] undermines the myth of worker acquiescence in the development of capitalist society. It shows a history of concerted worker resistance, at times open, at others covert, sometimes dramatic, sometimes almost invisible, but always there' (Brecher, 1978, p.20). The workers' resistance perspective stood in contrast with the patterns of accommodation that Michael Burawoy found in his ethnographic observation of the industrial workplace where effort was extracted both through coercion and consent (Gramscian hegemony). Perhaps, then, the hidden history of the workplace was one of consent after all, but during the 1980s the political offensive against labour in the US, UK and elsewhere tainted arguably hegemonic regimes with more than a hint of despotism. Factory politics could not be dissociated from state politics (Burawoy, 1979, 1985).

Critiques of the factory history tradition grew in number and force. By the end of the 1980s, in the British context, Jonathan Zeitlin scorned the focus on workers' self-activity as 'rank-and-filism.' His critique of the departure from the earlier institutional focus in labour history reflected the increasing attention given to the study of workers in the workplace and community (1987, 1989). Richard Price simultaneously defended (industrial) workplace analysis. He defined the factory as the site 'where the labour process is actualized and where the theory and practice of industrial relations strategies meet, founder, are successful or modified.' Only at this level could the historian 'capture at an intimate level one of the most important social relationships in society – that between worker and employer' (Price, 1989, p.64). In hindsight, and despite Price's rearguard action, this debate may be read as heralding the beginning of the industrial workplace's decline in labour historiography. Although sporadic interventions asserted the workplace's significance in the context of the disaggregation and decentering of workers' struggles (Wells, 1997), the study of shop floor industrial relations and its history subsequently diminished. This mirrored the contemporary decline in the incidence of strikes, lockouts and shop floor militancy. It may also have reflected critiques of 'essentialised' and teleological accounts of working-class agency associated with 'state socialist' regimes. In the 1990s, trend-setters in US and UK history departments started to consider any focus on class and industrial workers to be 'reductionist' and to be acting to obscure questions of culture, race and gender (Pearson, 2010). Labour historians who studied the factory fell out of fashion. Factory workers' waning public profile opened a period in which labour historians threw the baby out with the bathwater. The steady fragmentation of work and workplaces induced historians to study previously neglected categories of workers, from bricklayers to sailors, and it became common to see edited labour history volumes

omitting factory workers altogether. Labour history came to incorporate the stories of Canadian strippers, Indian street vendors and Irish nuns.

The global labour history approach developed as a response to the perceived twin crises of labour and social history, following the critiques of Eurocentrism and methodological nationalism in broader social science debates. Its goals questioned an agenda that was seen as focusing on male workers in industry and other large-scale operations, engaged in labour protests in the form of strikes or other trade union activities. (Van der Linden, 2008; Van Voss, 2013). One very real gain of the critique has been in the profession itself: labour historians from non-European contexts have moved beyond their previous function of filling in the blanks to problematizing the field's entire nature. As historians came to focus on working classes that were neither wholly industrial nor always waged, in locations outside of Western Europe and North America, they began to transcend traditional dichotomies between free and unfree labour, paid and unpaid work, formally and informally organised workers. Through connections with previous phases of globalisation, this had the effect of bringing geographical space and new historical periods more definitely into the history of capital-labour relations. Together, these two 'nutritional supplements' sustained labor history through hard times (Fink, 2011).

Thus, labour history in the past generation has generated an implicit and sometimes explicit critique of previous conceptual, linguistic and explanatory models (De Vito, 2012; Lucassen, 2006; Van der Linden, 2008; Van der Linden & Lucassen, 1999). Labour historians increasingly moved away from apparently reducing workers' experiences to work. The widening of labour history's perspectives renewed and centred previous contact with the history of everyday life, of communities, of urban space and gender. Theoretical interventions such as post-structuralism and feminist theory have received a good deal of attention from historians, and although they often leaned away from these, such theoretical trends meant that the classic categories of labour history could not be deployed uncritically. These developments permitted the centring of a broader approach to the history of labour, but simultaneously consigned factory history to obsolescence. As labour history transcended the confines of mature industrialised societies, it sought to become more 'global' and cross-fertilized with other sub-fields ranging from women's history to cultural anthropology and the history of technology. It also became affected by a high degree of fragmentation (Van der Linden & Lucassen, 1999, p.5). The distance between the socio-political problems of the 1980s and the politics of historiography was a relatively short one. The polemics of the former spilled over to the latter. Some of social history's more materialist standpoints rooted in the explanatory categories of Marxist history came under severe scrutiny (Gray, 1986, p. 363). Following the alleged shift to the post-industrial economy in the West and the emergence of epistemological paradigms which sought to displace grand narratives such as Marxism, the factory and industrial work ceased to impress historians with its potential to understand capitalism. Prior to this shift, however, twentieth century factory history had registered real achievements and laid some foundations for further developments. First, it theorised the workplace in historical studies. Second, it created an empirical base. In symbiosis with industrial sociology and industrial relations, the western tradition generated detailed micro-histories of shop floor accommodation and resistance. These achievements encouraged historians to look outside the factory, more fully to understand factory workers' identities. The need is for extended work in transnational history. In the UK, most recent publications in the trade union field have been judged insular and published work has appeared to 'incompletely reflect recent theorizing about transnational history' (McIlroy & Croucher, 2013). We have made a case for more completely realising the project through a renewed emphasis on the factory.

When labour history turned away from the factory as the imagined epicentre of class struggle in advanced, western capitalist society, no coherent and politically ambitious research agenda filled this vacuum. However, even as labour history seemed to move to the margins of the historiographical mainstream, historians have continued to focus on the factory through new interpretative lenses. Increasing emphasis on the construction and reconstruction of social identities in relation to work experience has arguably been the most important theoretical development in labour history in

the last four decades. In the 1980s, the discussion of gender and racial identity moved from the margins to the centre of working class history, a necessary correction to a field too often studied largely through the lens of class, which could allegedly translate on occasions into a focus on white male workers (Blewett, 1990; Cooper, 1987; Massey & McDowell, 1984; Ruiz, 1987). Although previous generations of labour historians made inroads in this area, labour history today focuses more intensively on the production of social difference both in relation to labour and to the social practices and discourses around it. From the origins of the factory system, and in diverse ways in different settings, factories have transformed identities and workers' self-representation. It does so *inter alia* through workplace segregation, discursive practices, the production process, and by the built environment's configuration. The factory is no secluded world, but a permeable environment where notions of labour are embodied, reproduced or challenged.

In the West, the politics of globalization and the changing geography of industrial production have prompted historians to examine the legacy of formerly thriving factories in a context of de-industrialization. The factory has therefore also become a 'site of memory', including both commemoration and public history, that could be studied through the increasingly epistemologically and methodologically sophisticated instrument of oral history (Clarke, 2011; Cowie & Heathcott, 2003; Klubock & Fontes, 2009; Mah, 2012). Despite the common use of death metaphors in relation to factory closures (Arman, 2014), historians have demonstrated that the history of the factory continues after the cessation of its productive aspect as its physical and symbolic existences give rise to contested visions of the industrial past, present and future (Bamberger & Davidson, 1998; High & Lewis, 2007; Modell, 1998).

In this issue

We present in this issue five articles that demonstrate the continuing relevance of the factory as a site of historical investigation. This selection, drawn from members of the Factory History working group established at the European Labour History Network, interweaves the history of the industrial workplace race, gender, national and transnational movements of labour and capital, memory, state policy and national ideology with class relations on the shop floor.

During Fordism, automobile plants received considerable attention from historians of the factory. Niccolò Serri's article nests an analysis of the effect of Italian welfare policy in the reconstruction of industrial conflict on the shop floor of Alfa Romeo's Arese plant, one the largest car factories in 1970s Italy. Overcoming the divide between the micro level of the production floor and the macro level of state policy, Serri demonstrates how car manufacturers shaped and employed the Italian system of short-time work subsidies, or *Cassa Integrazione Guadagni* (CIG) in order to quell conflict and recoup financial losses in a period of workers' insurgency. As a pliable welfare instrument highly adaptable to specific circumstances, Alfa Romeo managers used CIG selectively to target militant or inefficient workers as well as workers made idle by the bottlenecks caused by strikers. As denounced by both radical and mainstream trade unionists, employers found in the CIG a method of shifting some of the costs of industrial conflict onto the taxpayer, while purging the workforce of its troublemakers. Widespread use of this instrument meant that employers were able to mitigate the effects of the progressive political scenario introduced by the Charter of Workers' Rights at the height of workers mobilization. While the CIG provided a generous allowance, it still represented a loss of salary and isolated militants in a political 'no man's land'.

Factories are important sites for state intervention and regulation because of their economic and political roles. Industrial labour's strategic importance meant that governments have often been concerned with the shop floor's political climate. Drawing on Turkish sources, Görkem Akgöz connects the micro and macro levels of analysis by exploring the Turkish state factory Bakırköy as a site of 'discursive struggle' between different notions of working-class identity. In particular she discusses the interaction between one class-based conceptualisation and one attached to the nationalist discourse of republican Turkey. Akgöz shows in a specific setting how the project of state-

led industrialisation was deeply intertwined with nation-building. Within the discourse that the latter provided, the factory became a metonymy of the homeland, which the workers had a duty to build by toiling in the workshop. This notion implied embracing the fiction of an integrated society, where faithfulness to the nation trumped class distinctions. So powerful was the hegemonic grip of the idea of the 'working-class citizen' that workers resorted to using its tropes to claim rights in the work-place – since as contributors to the nation's welfare they were better positioned to win improved conditions in the factory, in particular in the context of the strong repression of Communism and militant organised labour. This was also a highly gendered discourse, which positioned the worker/citizen as male, attending to the needs of both the nation and his family. Eventually Akgöz's work shows that the two languages, of class and of the nation, were permeable and fluid in workers' lived experience.

Historians of former socialist countries have recently provided some of the most insightful contributions to factory history (Archer & Musić, 2017; Kirin & Blagaić, 2013). Chiara Bonfiglioli joins this conversation about the transition of industrial labour between different socio-economic regimes with a study of the female workforce of the Arena knitwear company in Pula, Croatia. Through oral history, she explores the memory of a socialist factory as the country underwent deindustrialization. Borrowing from Raymond Williams, Bonfiglioli investigates the gendered 'indus-trial structure of feeling' developed in Yugoslav times and how it is remembered currently. This 'structure' comprised feelings of 'belonging, pride, recognition, security and sociability' that were overturned by the transformation of the factory in post-socialist times and, eventually, its closure. Her study is notable by contributing a gendered perspective to the growing literature on workers 'nostalgia' for both industrialised work and the socialist era. Women generally remember that factory as a space of socialisation, solidarity and empowerment and alternative 'family' and 'home'. As the post-Yugoslav national discourse stigmatised memories of socialism as 'nostalgic' and the factory closed because of bankruptcy, feelings of loss, fear and abandonment intruded into their 'structure of feeling', challenging the ingrained idea that industrial work had a 'meaning'.

Fredrik Lilja presents a longitudinal study of a textile manufacturing company that relocated from England to South Africa in 1946, from its African establishment to its decline in the late 1980s. Lilja joins here a lively historiographical conversation that has found in the South African industrial workplace a fruitful laboratory to investigate the intersection between class and racial factors in the relations of production, the role of race in the politics of organised labour, and the working of racialised capitalism, sometimes in comparison with other countries (Lichtenstein, 2004; Lewis, 1990; Alexander & Halpern, 2004). Lilja focuses in particular on the intricacies of the segmented labour market on which the factory drew–black, white and coloured, male and female (and child), local and migratory, skilled and unskilled – and the segmentation of the political composition that ensued. Factories such the Hextex factory that he investigates were a central node in the racialized political economy and the struggle against it. After having examined how global capital reshaped the area where Hextex was established, Lilja draws a contrast between the strike of 1956 that tested Apartheid's new labour policies with displays of racial solidarity of political import, and one in 1989, which occurred in the context of downsizing and merger with another company. The latter focused on wages rather than on government policy. The 1989 strike, arguably a success, effectively decoupled the economic from the political struggle in the context of the industry's decline as an employer.

Elena Dinubila also reconstructs a story an industrial plant's location to a greenfield site. Similar to the phenomenon investigated by Jonathan Cowie, Dinubila traces how the Italian car manufacturer FIAT opened a state-of-the-art factory in the early 1990s, in a rural area of Basilicata, southern Italy. Thanks to a legal device, it could enjoy exclusion from the collective agreement that bound other unionised plants and exploit the advantage of being one of the few large employers (Cowie, 1999). Workers flocked to the Melfi factory, a 'happy island' in an economically-depressed region, but the relentless pace of work and managerial autocracy belied the post-Fordist hype that accompanied the plant's establishment. Against all odds, workers went on strike in 2004, finally achieving, albeit

temporarily, better working conditions. Dinubila captures the complex interplay of individual and collective memory of this event and the years that followed, through oral history. The factory becomes in a way a 'site of memory', but it is a memory without nostalgia for a brief episode of militancy that did not change the overall course of labour relations at Melfi. Collected in the 2010s, at the height of the economic crisis, Dinubila captures a collective memory that accommodates both resentment ('modern slavery' as some respondents dubbed it) for the pace of work under the 'World Class Manufacturing' (WCM) system imposed by CEO Marchionne and a positive pride in their status as efficient workers in a modern factory, with skills and an ethos surpassing those of others in the local labour market.

Conclusion

These contributions, and the wider working group from which they come, tend to confirm factory history's continued vitality. Many of the most dramatic moments in recent industrial experience – including the Rana Plaza tragedy in Bangladesh and the suicides by Chinese factory workers – have occurred in and around the factories that outside of such episodes frequently remain peripheral to most westerners' perceptions. This reveals that the factory's 'invisibility' in both current and historical agendas is less an outright disappearance and more a matter of marginalisation and disqualification (Clarke, 2011). Factory history can help raise public awareness and advance current debates within political economy, industrial relations and other cognate fields of study. It can thus provide historical comparisons and perspectives to areas that have shown only marginal interest in their fields' historical dimensions. We are not simply calling for a return to the factory as previously studied, although much earlier work should not too readily be dismissed. Rather, we call for a rethinking of the factory within labour history as a unit of analysis conceptualized in different ways at different moments, but always geographically specific, locally integrated, globally connected and located within an internationally comparative framework.

Factory history, as we showed, has long consisted of much more than the hagiographical studies commissioned by companies with which it has frequently and mistakenly been identified, and the teleological works typical of 'state socialism'. Indeed, it has been one of the more fertile sub-fields of labour history, notably through its analyses of micro-level social interactions. It has benefitted from excellent inputs from adjacent fields, perhaps most notably the anthropologists of the 1950s and 1960s and their contemporary descendants. When located at these disciplinary perspectives' cross-roads, historical analysis at the factory level offers a history of capitalism that goes beyond the workers' perspective to cover numerous angles using multiple methodologies across disciplinary barriers (Mihm, 2014). This history should contribute to balancing those abstracted histories that focus on the structural rather than the subjective dimensions of working-class history and which discuss labour only at the point of its objectification, a tendency Palmer observes. In attempting to bring the histories of labor and capital into their proper relationships, this history should encompass employers and workers, politics at different levels, racialized and gendered experiences and waged and non-waged forms of industrial work (Palmer, 2017).

Factory history has potential to be developed into one significant strand within 'transnational' labour history, which need not be not centred on or confined to the western worker, or limited by the associated assumptions. The great scope available for such work inevitably means that despite the inroads made, much remains to be done to realise the 'transnational' project. Factory history may assist. It need not and ought not to be parochial. It provides a way of linking localised centres of production with wider global relationships and forces. A micro-level analysis is where this type of integration works best. As Francesca Trivellato demonstrated, micro-history is in no way antithetic to global history (2011). This applies particularly to the industrial work-place, where plants often have numerous links to other locales, while global value chains are becoming ever more important. The factory here emerges as a geographically specific, locally integrated place, located at the intersections of local, national or global connections. They are

sites through which labour history can contribute much understanding of capitalism in its multiple contexts.

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