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Part I

**Introduction: Bringing historical sociology
back into international relations**

1 What's at stake in 'bringing historical sociology *back* into international relations'? Transcending 'chronofetishism' and 'tempocentrism' in international relations

John M. Hobson

Introduction: the growing convergence of historical sociology and international relations

Since the late 1970s historical sociology has been implicitly moving towards international relations, while, since the early 1980s, international relations has begun to explicitly move towards historical sociology. Although Theda Skocpol (1979) most famously insisted that the 'international' should be brought into historical sociology, it is clear that such a move was already in the air (e.g., Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974; Tilly, 1975a; Bendix, 1978; Poggi, 1978), and had in fact been waiting in the wings ever since the early 1900s – e.g., Weber (1978, originally published in 1922), Elias (1994[1939]) and Hintze (1975), the last comprising a series of essays which were originally published between 1896 and 1937. Moreover, this move has since gathered some momentum within historical sociology (Giddens, 1985; Mann, 1986, 1993; Tilly, 1990; Goldstone, 1991). And on the other side of the 'border', a few international relations theorists began to look to historical sociology in the very early 1980s, as a means of enhancing and reconfiguring their discipline (e.g., Ruggie, 1983; Cox, 1986; cf. Ashley, 1986); this is a development that has gathered momentum through the 1980s and 1990s (e.g., Halliday, 1987, 1994, 1999; Jarvis, 1989; Linklater, 1990, 1998; Scholte, 1993; Buzan, Jones and Little, 1993; Thomson, 1994; Spruyt, 1994; Rosenberg, 1994; Ferguson and Mansbach, 1996; Frank and Gills, 1996; Hobson, 1997, 1998a; Hobden, 1998, 1999a, 1999b; Reus-Smit, 1999; M. Hall, 1999; R. Hall, 1999). It is both *significant* that historical sociologists working outside international relations have been slow to pick

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up on the complementary developments within international relations, and *unfortunate*, given that such oversight arguably comes at a significant cost (see Hobson, Smith, Halliday and Hobson & Hobden, this volume). Historical sociologists would do well, therefore, to follow the progress of their ‘cousins’ within international relations. Nevertheless, it seems fair to state that the ‘boundaries between those writers in international relations who are interested in taking a historical sociological approach and the macro-sociologists in Historical Sociology are . . . breaking down’ (Hobden, 1998: 196).

However, despite this growing momentum of interest in historical sociology within international relations, and despite the fact that historical sociology is often mentioned, or referred to, by international relations scholars, no ‘take-off’ is as yet in evidence. Moreover, there is as yet only a very rudimentary understanding of what historical sociology is, and what it has to offer international relations – in much the same way that historical sociologists have only a very rudimentary understanding of international relations and what it has to offer them. It is as if historical sociology is *seen* by international relations scholars, but not *heard*. And while international relations is currently undergoing a ‘sociological turn’, often equated with the rise of constructivism, we argue here that the ‘sociological turn’ can only be *fully* realised by bringing ‘history’ back in. Indeed the primary purpose of this volume is its calling for an ‘*historical* sociological turn’ in international relations. The volume, therefore, acts as a kind of *historical sociology manifesto*, which can relay to the wider international relations audience what some of the major variants of historical sociology look like; show how they can be applied to international relations; explain why international relations theorists *should* engage with historical sociology; and demonstrate how historical sociological insight can enhance and reconfigure the study of international relations. In the process, we hope that historical sociology might shift from its current peripheral position closer to the centre of the international relations research agenda. By implication, this volume simultaneously constitutes an *international relations manifesto* which can relay to a wider historical sociology audience what some of the major international relations variants have to offer them, and demonstrate how international relations insight can enhance and reconfigure the study of historical sociology.

This opening chapter has two core objectives: the first part appraises mainstream international relations theory through a critical historical sociological lens, and reveals its ahistorical and asociological biases, while the second part lays out in summary form seven major theoretical approaches which are covered in this volume, all of which suggest ways

to transcend or remedy prevailing modes of ahistoricism and asociologism in international relations. Steve Hobden's contribution to this introduction (chapter 2) then considers how and why mainstream international relations has been *reconstructed* in the last fifty years along asociological and ahistorical lines – given his claim that before 1919, international relations comprised a corpus of knowledge which incorporated various disciplines, not least economics, history, sociology, law and moral philosophy. He ends by discussing the contribution that historical sociology can make to enhancing the study of international relations.

Revealing the 'chronofetishist' and 'tempocentric' foundations of mainstream international relations

There is little doubt that much, though clearly not all, of contemporary international relations is 'historophobic', in that it views historical analysis as superfluous, or exogenous, to the subject matter of the discipline (though as Steve Hobden shows in chapter 2, this has not *always* been the case in the history of the discipline). To the extent that contemporary mainstream international relations theorists have concerned themselves with history, they have generally employed what might be called an 'instrumentalist' view of history, where history is used not as a means to rethink the present, but as a quarry to be mined only in order to confirm theories of the present (as found especially in neorealism). As Michael Barnett puts it in his chapter, 'If history mattered at all it was as a field of data to be mined, for cases to be shoehorned in the pursuit of grand theory building, and for evidence of the cycles of history that realists used to mark historical time' (p. 100; also, Cox, 1986: 212). Or as Rosecrance declared, 'history is a laboratory in which our generalizations about international politics can be tested' (Rosecrance, 1973: 25).

By contrast, we argue for the employment of a 'temporally relativist' or 'constitutive' reading of history, in which theorists examine history not simply for its own sake or to tell us more about the past, nor simply as a means to confirm extant theorising of the present, but rather as a means to *rethink* theories and *problematise* the analysis of the present, and thereby to *reconfigure* the international relations research agenda. Ignoring history does not simply do an injustice to the *history* of the international system. Most significantly, it leads to a problematic view of the *present*. Seen through an historical sociological lens, mainstream international relations appears caught within two modes of ahistoricism and asociologism: what I shall call *chronofetishism* and *tempocentrism*.

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The first mode of ahistoricism: 'chronofetishism'

The construction of the term *chronofetishism* – not to be confused with Powelson's (1994) term 'chronocentrism' – takes as its starting point Karl Marx's concept of 'fetishism'. In *Capital*, Marx argued that liberal political economists fall into the trap of fetishism when they argue that, for example, the commodity has an inherent value that is *autonomous* of class exploitation. In the process, the commodity is reified, and thus 'a definite social relation between men . . . assumes in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things' (Marx, 1954: 77). Marx's 'scientific method' remedies 'commodity fetishism' by revealing the exploitative class relations by which the value of a particular commodity is determined. In the process, he shows that the commodity is not autonomous because it does not exist in a sphere that is independent of the relations of production (Marx, 1954: 76–87). More generally, he takes classical liberal political economists to task primarily on the grounds that in *reifying* capitalism as a phenomenon that operates according to its own self-constituting 'laws of supply and demand', and by thereby obscuring the contradictory class relations upon which capitalism is founded, they fall prey to the fetishist illusion that capitalism is 'natural', 'autonomous' and consequently 'eternal'. Marx's project in *Capital* was to remedy this fetishist illusion by uncovering the exploitative and transformative class processes that define capitalism, thereby revealing its unnatural and transient nature.

By extension, *chronofetishism*, the assumption that the present can adequately be explained only by examining the present (thereby bracketing or ignoring the past), gives rise to three illusions:

- (1) *reification illusion*: where the present is effectively 'sealed off' from the past, making it appear as a *static, self-constituting, autonomous* and *reified* entity, thereby obscuring its historical socio-temporal context;
- (2) *naturalisation illusion*: where the present is effectively *naturalised* on the basis that it emerged 'spontaneously' in accordance with 'natural' human imperatives, thereby obscuring the historical processes of social power, identity/social exclusion and norms that constitute the present;
- (3) *immutability illusion*: where the present is *eternalised* because it is deemed to be natural and resistant to structural change, thereby obscuring the processes that reconstitute the present as an immanent order of change.

Table 1 reveals the essence of these two ahistorical modes, chronofetishism and tempocentrism, and juxtaposes them with the historical sociological *remedies* that this book is concerned to develop. We begin by revealing the problems with the three illusions of chronofetishism. The

Table 1. *Conceptualising the two dominant modes of ahistoricism in international relations*

Mode of ahistoricism	Resulting illusions (danger)	Historical sociological remedy (escape)
<i>Chronofetishism</i>	<p>A mode of ahistoricism which leads to three illusions:</p> <p>(1) <i>Reification illusion</i> where the present is effectively 'sealed off' from the past, thereby obscuring its historical socio-temporal context, and making it appear as a <i>static, self-constituting, autonomous and reified</i> entity;</p> <p>(2) <i>Naturalisation illusion</i> where the present is effectively <i>naturalised</i> on the basis that it emerged 'spontaneously' in accordance with 'natural' human imperatives, thereby obscuring the historical processes of social power, identity/social exclusion and norms that constitute the present;</p> <p>(3) <i>Immutability illusion</i> where the present is <i>eternalised</i> because it is deemed to be natural and resistant to structural change, thereby obscuring the processes that reconstitute the present as an immanent order of change.</p>	<p>Employment of historical sociology to:</p> <p>(1) Reveal the present as a <i>malleable construct</i> which is embedded in a historical context, thereby serving to unearth the processes of temporal continuity and discontinuity with previous social practices;</p> <p>(2) Denaturalise the present and reveal that it emerged not in accordance with 'natural' human impulses but rather through processes of power, identity/social exclusion and norms;</p> <p>(3) Reveal the present as constituted by transformative (<i>morphogenetic</i>) processes that continuously reconstitute present institutions and practices.</p>
<i>Tempocentrism</i>	<p>A mode of ahistoricism which leads to the:</p> <p>(4) <i>Isomorphic illusion</i> in which the 'naturalised' and 'reified' present is extrapolated backwards in time to present all historical systems as 'isomorphic' or 'homologous', resulting in the <i>failure to recognise the unique features</i> of the present (an <i>inverted</i> 'path dependency').</p>	<p>To remedy tempocentrism, historical sociology:</p> <p>(4) Traces the fundamental <i>differences</i> between past and present international systems and institutions, to thereby <i>reveal the unique constitutive features of the present</i>.</p>

'reification illusion' – the assumption that the present is autonomous and self-constituting – is problematic because it ignores the fact that no historical epoch has ever been static and entirely 'finished' or 'complete', but has been in the process of forming and re-forming. Historical sociological enquiry is able to remedy the 'reification illusion' by revealing the present as a *malleable construct* that is embedded within a specific socio-temporal context. The assumption that the present is autonomous and self-constituting is also a classic sign of the second chronofetishist illusion – the presumption that the present system is 'natural' and that it emerged *spontaneously* in accordance with 'natural' imperatives. This illusion is problematic because it necessarily obscures the manifold processes of social power, identity/social exclusion and norms, which constituted the present system. Thus, for example, Kenneth Waltz assumes that the international system emerged spontaneously through the unintended consequences of state interaction (Waltz, 1979: 91); and that the modern sovereign state is the highest form of political organisation, not least because an alternative world government 'would stifle liberty [and] become a terrible despotism' (Waltz, 1986: 341; 1979: 112). Liberals see in liberal capitalism and the modern democratic state the highest forms of economic and political expression, because they supposedly reflect the impulses of human nature – namely the inherent propensity to 'truck, barter and exchange one thing for another' (Adam Smith, 1937: 13).

Finally, the 'immutability illusion' – the notion that the present is immune or resistant to structural change and thereby 'eternalised' – is problematic because it obscures the *transformative* or 'morphogenetic' (Archer, 1982) processes that are immanent within the present order. Neorealism and liberalism both fall into this trap, though in different ways. Liberalism believes that with liberal capitalism and democracy, history has reached its terminus, with no fundamental change beyond the present being either possible or desirable (Fukuyama, 1992). Neorealism argues similarly that structural change within or beyond the present is impossible. Indeed, Waltz's theory 'contains only a reproductive logic, but no transformational logic' (Ruggie, 1986: 151), in that *systems maintenance* is fundamentally inscribed into the structure of Waltz's theory, given that it is logically impossible for one state to create a hierarchy under the 'balance of power' (Waltz, 1979: ch. 6; see also Hobson, 2000: 26–30). And ironically, Waltz's (1986: 340–1) reply to Ashley – that the balance of power has and always will continue to exist – merely confirms the conclusion that neorealism is, indeed, 'a *historicism of stasis*. It is a historicism that freezes the political institutions of the current world order', thereby ruling out the possibility of future change (Ashley, 1986: 289, 258, 290–1). Thus neorealism's ahistoricism is symptomatic of a 'problem-solving

theory' that is distinguished from an historical sociological 'critical theory' (Cox, 1986). However, chronofetishism does not exist in isolation, and is deeply entwined with a second form of ahistoricism in international relations: what I call *tempocentrism*.

The second mode of ahistoricism: 'tempocentrism'

If chronofetishism leads to a 'sealing off' of the present such that it appears as an autonomous, natural, spontaneous and immutable entity, tempocentrism extrapolates this 'chronofetishised' present backwards through time such that *discontinuous* ruptures and *differences* between historical epochs and states systems are smoothed over and consequently obscured. In this way, history appears to be marked, or is regulated, by a regular tempo that beats according to the same, constant rhythm of the present (reified) system. This is in fact an *inverted* form of 'path dependency'. Tempocentrism is, in effect, a methodology in which theorists look at *history* through a 'chronofetishist lens'. In other words, in reconstructing all historical systems so as to conform to a reified and naturalised present, they tarnish all systems as homologous or 'isomorphic' (i.e., as having the same structure). In this way, the study of international relations takes on a 'transhistorical' quality.

It is *this* tempocentric manoeuvre which leads such theorists to look constantly for signs of the present in the past, and, in a type of self-fulfilling prophecy, come back and report that the past is indeed the same as the present. Thus, for example, the dominant theory of international relations – neorealism – assumes either that history is repetitive such that nothing ever changes because of the timeless presence of anarchy (Waltz, 1979), or that history takes on the form of repetitive and isomorphic 'great power/hegemonic' cycles, each phase of which is essentially identical, with the only difference being *which* great power is rising or declining – i.e., same play, different actors (Gilpin, 1981). In this way, neorealists assume that the 'superpower' contest between Athens and Sparta is equivalent to the recent cold war between the USA and the USSR; or that current US state behaviour is broadly equivalent to that of historical great powers such as sixteenth-century Spain, the seventeenth-century United Provinces (Netherlands), eighteenth-century France, or nineteenth-century Britain (Kennedy, 1988; cf. Gilpin, 1981). Moreover, neorealists assume that ancient imperialism is equivalent to that found in the nineteenth century (Waltz, 1979: ch. 2); or that all great-power wars are rooted in the same causes (Gilpin, 1981); or that European feudal heteronomy is broadly equivalent to the modern system and can be understood in similar ways (Fischer, 1992). At the most general level, neorealists tempocentrically

conclude that ‘the classic history of Thucydides is as meaningful a guide to the behavior of states today as when it was written in the fifth century BC’ (Gilpin, 1981: 7), or that ‘balance of power politics in much the form that we know it has been practiced over the millennia by many different types of political units, from ancient China and India, to the Greek and Italian city states, and unto our own day’ (Waltz, 1986: 341). It is this ‘trick’ to represent all historical actors and systems as isomorphic or homologous that leads neorealists to conclude that world politics *must* always have been governed by the timeless and constant logic of anarchy, which thereby enables them to dismiss the utility of historical sociological enquiry (see Waltz, 1979: 43–9).

What is the matter with this view of international history that Rob Walker (1993) has labelled ‘the theme of Gulliver’? Firstly, it presents the whole of international history as a static, monolithic entity that operates according to a constant and timeless logic, such that structural change becomes entirely obscured. The problem here is that this ignores the fact that there has not been one international system but many, all of which are quite different, and all of which are marked by different rhythms or tempos. But more importantly, the fundamental problem with tempocentrism is that in constructing states systems and actors as isomorphic throughout world-historical time, *the theorist fails to recognise the uniqueness of the present system and simultaneously obscures some of its most fundamental or constitutive features*. This ‘tempocentric paradox’ can be simply expressed: that in extrapolating a reified present back in time, the theorist not only does a disservice to the past, but, more importantly, does serious injustice to understanding the present. Thus mainstream international relations theory (as in neorealism and neoliberal institutionalism) takes for granted precisely those categories about the contemporary era that need to be problematised and explained. Historical sociology’s prime mandate is to reveal and remedy the tempocentrism (as well as chronofetishism) of mainstream and conventional international relations theory. Thus, for example, when we show through historical sociological enquiry that the rivalry between Athens and Sparta is *not* equivalent to that between the USA and the USSR (not least because the former rivalry – unlike the latter – existed within a single international society), the problem becomes to refocus our explanation on the unique particularities of the Cold War. Or, when we show through historical sociological enquiry that all historical forms of imperialism have *not* been equivalent, not least because they have been embedded within different normative environments (R. Hall, 1999), we are forced to rethink the specific normative processes that inform the uniqueness of modern imperialism. Or when we show that European medieval heteronomy is

very different to the modern Westphalian system (Hall and Kratochwil, 1993), again because of radically different normative settings, we are necessarily forced to rethink the unique normative constitutive features of the latter. Similarly, when we show through historical sociological enquiry that ancient historical states systems are not equivalent to the modern Westphalian system, either because of different class-based contexts (Rosenberg, 1994), or because of different moral purposes of the state (Reus-Smit, 1999), we are forced to rethink the various social processes which gave rise to, and constitute, the unique qualities of the modern system.

Tempocentrism is also fundamental to the neorealist theory of hegemonic stability. Thus when we show through historical sociological enquiry that Britain in the nineteenth century either had a very different foreign policy to that of the United States between 1945 and 1973, or was *not* actually a hegemon (Schroeder, 1994; Hobson, 1997: 199–204; Mann, 1993: ch. 8), it becomes apparent that hegemony is unique to one country (the United States) at one particular time in history. Here neorealists err by drawing out some of the basic features of US foreign policy, which are equated with hegemony as a generic phenomenon, and then, in typical tempocentric fashion, extrapolating this conception back in time to 'fit' the British case. Given also that Japan turns out to be a poor candidate for future hegemony, as most Japan specialists conclude (Inoguchi, 1988; Taira, 1993; Katzenstein, 1996a), we are left with only one example of a hegemon (at least within the neorealist canon), a conclusion which logically undermines this cyclical theory of hegemony. But the key point is that such tempocentrism not only does a disservice to understanding Britain in the nineteenth century, but also renders problematic our understanding of US hegemony in the twentieth century, as well as the question of a future hegemony. The problem then becomes *not* to analyse American *hegemony*, but to rethink the specific origins of *American* hegemony (Ruggie, 1993b, 1998b: ch. 4) – a project which requires historical sociological insight. Finally, when we show that the free trade regimes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were radically different from each other, so we need to rethink the specific and unique social processes that enabled the modern free trade regime (Hobson, this volume, pp. 78–80).

Tempocentrism is also found in neoliberal institutionalism and its theory of international regimes (e.g., Keohane, 1984). Neoliberals assume that states have fixed identities and interests; that they are rational egoists that seek to maximise their long-term utility gains, and that this can best be achieved when states harness themselves to co-operative norms that are embodied within state-constructed international regimes. While arguably