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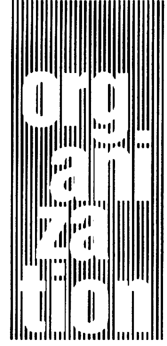
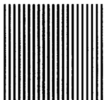


elias and organization

Organization: The Relevance and the Limitations of Elias

Tim Newton
University of Exeter, UK

Abstract. *In this introductory paper, I use a quotation from Elias's (1992) essay on time in order to introduce some key Eliasian concepts. I then explore the relation between power, interdependency and subjectivity through reference to Elias's oft-cited studies of court society as well as his less known analyses of time. Drawing on these referents, I discuss the relation of Elias to current organization theory focusing on Foucauldian work, Marx and labour process theory and, especially, actor-network theory. Eliasian argument has a number of points of contact with current fields of organizational analysis such as organizational strategy, violence in organizations, emotion in organizations, knowledge and discourse, globalization, organizations and the natural environment, etc. The paper briefly reviews such examples before considering certain limitations in Elias's conceptualization of interdependency and subjectivity.* ***Key words.*** *actor-network theory; Elias; organization theory; organizational analysis; social theory*



In writing this paper, I have tried to gain some balance between introduction, exploration, and critique. That said, it is impossible to give a thorough account of 'Eliasian' argument within the context of a single paper. Instead, I shall try to convey something of the breadth of Elias's work while relating it to social and organization theory and current fields of organizational analysis. Finally, I will support, challenge and re-interpret critique of Elias.

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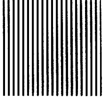

Central Eliasian Concepts

I shall start by reproducing a quotation from Elias. Though it is rather lengthy, it is worth quoting because it highlights several characteristics of Elias's work. The quotation takes the form of a story that Elias uses to emphasize the way in which people forget their 'social past' (Elias, 1992: 135):

> I once read the story of a group of people who climbed higher and higher in an unknown and very high tower. The first generation got as far as the fifth storey, the second reached the seventh, the third the tenth. In the course of time their descendants attained the hundredth storey. Then the stairs gave way. The people established themselves on the hundredth storey. With the passage of time they forgot that their ancestors had ever lived on lower floors and how they had arrived at the hundredth floor. They saw the world and themselves from the perspective of the hundredth floor, without knowing how people had arrived there. They even regarded the ideas they formed from the perspective of their floor as universal human ideas. (Elias, 1992: 135)

Elias's key point in this quotation is that our contemporary ideas are not universal or timeless but represent the product of *generations of interwoven interdependency networks*. We therefore cannot understand ourselves without attending to such development. This argument remains significant because people still tend to think of themselves, their emotions and their subjectivity as 'self-evident'. For example, what it means to be angry, sad or mad often seems 'obvious' and 'natural' in spite of indications that our emotions are culturally and historically conditioned (e.g. Lutz, 1988; Elias, 1994a; Morgan, 1994; Newton, 1997). Equally, we take our senses of independence, or privacy, or time for granted as though all cultures at all times shared these sensibilities and perceptions. Yet, for Elias, such senses of ourselves are not a given but instead reflect the interweaving of human interdependencies across numerous generations. Over time, human groups have socially learnt privacy or time, or when and where it is appropriate to be angry, sad or mad.

Understanding this temporal development means focusing on interdependency networks, which Elias referred to as *figurations*. At the heart of this concept is an emphasis that human life is deeply social and that this sociality works through interdependency networks that operate across vast stretches of time. Developing such a multi-generational perspective remains difficult however because 'the relatively short time-span of a human life appears to serve people as [the] principal frame of reference' (1991b: 30).

In quotations such as that of the 'hundredth floor' story above, Elias also attempts to signal the closed perspective that results when life is viewed in an ahistorical and decontextualized manner 'from the hundredth floor'. He argues that such a perspective is still relatively common because people live in 'closed worlds', unaware of their interdependencies

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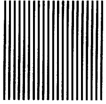

with others in the present *or* the past. He named this latter tendency *Homo clausus*, and he saw it as reflecting a strong post-Renaissance tendency for people to disassociate themselves from the societies they inhabit, to see themselves like a 'closed box' (1970: 119). Elias suggests that this identity arises partly because 'from infancy we are brought up to become independent, perfectly self-reliant adults, cut off from everyone else' (1970: 118). The consequence is that for many people there is 'an invisible barrier [that] separates their "inside" from everything "outside"—the so-called "outside world" ' (1970: 119). Elias (1970, 1992) felt that a *Homo clausus* perspective informed much of the social sciences. Against this perspective, Elias stresses the need for an image of people as interdependent and interconnected, what he refers to as *Homines aperti*, or 'the image of a multitude of people, each of them relatively open, interdependent processes' (1970: 121). From this perspective of chains of interdependence we can begin to understand both our own historically formed subjectivity, and the way in which power relations reflect a complex interweaving of interdependencies amongst people, a 'networked agency'.

Within this networked agency, no single individual or group can 'determine history' since their intentions and actions are always likely to be affected by others on whom they are dependent. Strategists, whether politicians, managers or revolutionaries, are likely to have their ambitions moderated because social 'outcomes' represent the '*interweaving* of countless individual interests and intentions' (1994a: 389, emphasis added). Since 'outcomes' represent interwoven actions, 'something comes into being that was planned and intended by none of these individuals, yet has emerged nevertheless from their intentions and actions' (Elias, 1994a: 389). Ordering is therefore often *unintended* since it frequently represents the interweaving of many 'players', none of whom can easily predict the actions of others in diverse networks, or the 'outcomes' of the interweaving of their actions with such others. For instance, in organizational terms, it is difficult for organizational members to predict the actions of competitors, suppliers, governments, etc., or the *interweaving* of such actions. The consequence is that strategies are likely to be compromised, particularly those of the 'deliberate' 'classical/rational planning' variety (see below).

The above 'hundredth floor' quotation is also of interest in one other respect: it both points to potential criticism of Elias, yet at the same time illustrates how such criticism is difficult to sustain uniformly because of ambiguities in his argument. For instance, in the above quotation, there is an implicit, and debatable, commitment to some notion of 'progress' as people rise to 'higher and higher levels'. Such a notion of direction and progress is arguably a feature of Elias's work, and one that is of course open to critique (van Krieken, 1998). Yet, at the same time, Elias appears keenly aware of the difficulties of notions of development and progress (e.g. Elias, 1991a). This represents a not uncommon feature of Elias in

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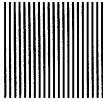

that he exhibits not just ambiguity, but 'awareness', in many of the areas where he is open to critique (see below). It means that a cursory examination of Elias's work can be misleading, a situation sufficiently common that 'Eliasians' are wont to argue that his work 'has been frequently misconstrued' (Dunning, 1992: 221).

Power, Emotion, Subjectivity and Time

As implied above, Elias felt that figuration, emotion and subjectivity were deeply interwoven. His best-known example of this interrelation comes from his studies of the formation of the royal courts of Western Europe (especially France), described in *The Civilizing Process* (Elias, 1994a). Though these analyses are clearly *not* concerned with present-day organizations, they are worth exploring in order to illustrate the Eliasian interpretation of power and subjectivity.

Through lengthy and detailed analysis, Elias reveals how the subjectivity of knights and chieftains was interwoven with 'figurational change', particularly the monopolization of violence that occurred with the development of stable monarchies. Elias illustrates how, prior to this monopolization, individuals could take open pleasure in acts of violence and were subject to rather limited emotional and behavioural restraint in comparison with that which pertains in contemporary western society. However, the monarchic monopolization of the means of violence meant that knights and chieftains no longer warred over their individual fiefdoms, but instead became the new subjects of a centralized power. Royal courts represented new kinds of interdependency network characterized by 'pacified social spaces' (Elias, 1994a: 451) where courtiers begged favour to the monarch whilst others begged access to the court. As knights became courtiers, they found themselves in 'monopoly-bound competition for the opportunities the monopoly ruler has to allocate' (Elias, 1994a: 474). This *figurational* change occasioned a disciplined subjectivity where:

> . . . the coarser habits, the wilder, more uninhibited customs of medieval society with its warrior upper class, the corollaries of an uncertain, constantly threatened life, were 'softened', 'polished' and 'civilized'. The pressure of court life, the vying for the favour of the prince or the 'great'; then, more generally, the necessity to distinguish oneself from others and to fight for opportunities with relatively peaceful means, through intrigue and diplomacy, *enforced a constraint on the affects, a self-discipline and self-control, a peculiarly courtly rationality.* (Elias, 1994a: 268, added emphasis)

The power balance of the royal court was not a total asymmetry where the monarch 'ruled supreme'. Instead, monarchies always held some fragility, dependent on maintaining a coalition that could threaten to 'gather' and depose the monarch, and where the bestowing of honour and rank could be seen as an appeasement of knights who could still

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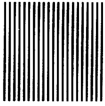

entertain violence. Monarchs did not 'own' some absolute power and the monopolization of violence was never total. Yet, within the 'pacified social space' of this coalition, the monarch held sway, and intrigue, diplomacy and emotional restraint were more likely to prove effective than the 'coarser . . . wilder . . . customs' of the 'warrior upper class': the interdependency network of the royal court therefore encouraged a disciplined, 'courtly', subjectivity.

In sum, Elias uses his analysis of court society to argue that there is no separation between a 'micro-analytical' concern with emotion and subjectivity and a 'macro-analytical' interest in power configurations. Central to Elias's (1994a) argument is the proposition that the emotion codes of individual courtiers were interrelated with the power relations of the royal court. Power and subjectivity remain interwoven.[1] For Elias, this process starts early in childhood development since power relations are 'built into' the subjectivity we learn as children. For example, the children of courtiers learnt an emotional restraint that was itself interwoven with the power relations of the royal court.

Elias also uses his analyses in *The Civilizing Process* to construct a more general argument that lengthening interdependencies occasion increased emotional discipline:

> The closer the web of interdependence becomes in which the individual is enmeshed . . . the larger the social spaces over which this network extends . . . the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects, and the more strongly is each individual constrained from an early age to take account of his own or other people's actions on a whole series of links in the social chain. (Elias, 1994a: 448)

For instance, Elias (1994a) argues that the emotional discipline of courtiers arose principally because they were enmeshed in far lengthier and complex interdependencies that those observed by the aristocracy of feudal village society. In other words, they had to adapt and *restrain* their behaviour through interaction with a much larger array of others. It is this greater social complexity which Elias portrays as the chief constraint on affect and behaviour.

As an example of the interweaving between interdependency complexity and subjectivity, Elias's study of court society is increasingly well known. What is less appreciated is the range of argument that Elias marshals in order to show how modernity is characterized by a growing complexity in interdependency networks, which has strongly conditioned our sense of who we are. For instance, Elias paid considerable attention to the social significance of time, and the ways in which clocks and temporal regulation provided a means of coordination across increasingly dense interdependencies (Elias, 1987a, 1991b, 1992). As Richard Kilminster notes, Elias shows how in modern societies 'highly self-controlled people have to adjust themselves to each other as part of an increasingly intricate mesh of contacts . . . which requires a socially

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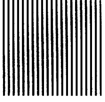

standardized . . . symbol of timing' (1991b: xvi). The railways and telegraphy standardized 'clock time' as a *social device*. Without clock time, coordination across the temporally and spatially compressed networks of modernity would be impossible (Newton, 2000a). As Elias also notes, timing is central to the interdependency networks of *organizational* life: 'the profusion of . . . appointments' of the 'official or businessman . . . is an expression of the multitude of interdependent actions, of the *length and density of the chains* composed by the individual actions, and of the intensity of struggles that keep this whole interdependent network *in motion*' (1994a: 457, added emphasis).

Elias is also concerned to illustrate how time and timing, *like many other aspects of our subjectivity*, often becomes invisible to us and taken for granted. We forget how our sense of time represents a *figurational development* that arose in the context of the complex interdependencies made possible by financial credit (Ingham, 1999), railways, telegraphy, print, etc. In contemporary organizations, we take time for granted as part of our everyday subjectivity, and often remain inattentive to the fact that the 'working day' and our whole sense of the measurement of time is a modern social construction that would be entirely alien to people living in pre-modern societies. As Elias argues, 'once they have learnt it . . . members of . . . industrialized state societies . . . appear to forget that they have to learn time' (1992: 139). As he further notes:

> We have slipped into an ever-present sense of time. *It has become part of our own person.* As such it becomes self-evident. *It seems that we cannot experience the world otherwise.* (1992: 162, added emphasis)

This quotation once again illustrates the more general Eliasian argument that people tend to view themselves 'from the hundredth floor' (see above) and forget the ways in which our subjectivity is historically conditioned, whether it is our sense of time, our emotions, or our *seeming* independence.

To sum up, central to Elias's work is a conception of human agency as composed of interdependent networks. For Elias, understanding social relations means analysing the figurational development of interdependency networks and the ways in which they define power relations and inform subjectivity. Whether we wish to understand rules of emotional display and restraint, or the social significance of time, or our sense of human agency, we need to place our analysis in a figurational context that is based on multigenerational, interwoven and interconnected networks of actors, or *Homines aperti*, rather than the socially divorced image of the individual as a 'closed box', or *Homo clausus*. We need therefore to be attentive to the ways that as children and adults we 'slip' into forms of subjectivity and power relation that have developed within interdependency webs that have grown in complexity over decades, centuries and millennia.

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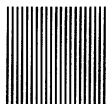

With the above as a very brief introduction to Eliasian thinking, I will now consider how his work re-frames existing organizational theory, focusing on actor-network theory, labour process theory and the work of Foucault. Following this discussion, I will then consider how Eliasian argument can inform some existing fields of organizational inquiry.

Elias and Social/Organization Theory: Elias and Foucault

Though Foucault was aware of Elias's work and even translated one of his books (van Krieken, 1998: 39), there is nevertheless a tendency amongst Foucauldians to misinterpret Elias (Newton, 1999, and see below). Even amongst more accurate readings of Elias, there is also variation in the interpretation of his relation to Foucault (e.g. van Krieken, 1990; Burkitt, 1993; Smith, 1999). On the one hand, Dennis Smith (1999) notes the similarities between Elias and Foucault such as their joint undermining of notions of *Homo clausus*, their use of similar philosophical reference points such as Socrates and Kant, their joint stress on the transformation of selfhood, bodily functions, human feelings, etc., in the course of western history. On the other hand, Ian Burkitt underscores the points where Foucault and Elias diverge. In particular, Burkitt (1993) stresses the de-socializing tendencies within Foucault reflected in concepts such as 'agonism' and 'pleasure' that appear asocial in nature. For instance, Burkitt suggests that Foucault's agonism displays strong vestiges of the essentialism of Nietzsche, since 'struggle' and 'provocation' are portrayed as an essential and asocial part of the natural order.

Whether or not one subscribes wholeheartedly to the latter critique, it is not too difficult to point to the de-socializing tendencies that can arise in the Foucauldian analysis of organizations. For there remains the danger that subjects will appear as passive dupes 'constituted by the intersection of "discursive planes"' (Benhabib, 1992: 216) with the consequence that 'discursive practices' resemble 'subjectless practices' (Mouzelis, 1995: 97). One manager, say, reads the language of excellence and empowerment and becomes an 'excellent' 'empowering' manager; another reads corporate strategy and is passively manufactured into a strategist; another reads (not so) new HRM and automatically becomes a 'new' human resource manager (Newton and Findlay, 1996; Findlay and Newton, 1998).

From an Eliasian perspective, exploring such constitution of the self requires a greater attention to the interweaving of discourse and interdependency than Foucauldian analyses often afford, as well as examination of the frequently *asymmetrical* form of interdependency. For example, 'post-entrepreneurial' business parlance can be seen to repackage and legitimate the asymmetrical interdependencies that characterize organizational life. People are said to be inside or outside 'the loop', a language that glosses and legitimizes the existence of hierarchy and clique. Employees are said to be 'on-message' so long as they toe the corporate

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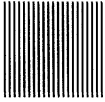

line. This is a language of corralling as much as enrolling (cf. Callon, 1986) that seeks to silence opposition and rationalize, if not sharpen, asymmetry. Surely everyone wants to be 'in the loop' and 'on-message' and share in the 'dynamism' of this advanced liberal, post-entrepreneurial world. To do otherwise is to be a dinosaur, someone who wants to be nannied rather than immersed in this exciting 'can-do', 'problem-owning', 'go-getting' landscape. Notions of opposition and resistance appear anachronistic, no longer relevant, best confined to coal-mining museums and the heritage industry. Within Anglo-Saxon culture, and perhaps especially in the UK, what is remarkable is the success of much of advanced liberalism at the level of the organization and the state (Miller and Rose, 1990; Fairclough, 1995), its language routinely pedalled by the political right and supposed left, well and truly 'spread over the surface of things' in a Foucauldian sense. Getting beyond it feels like coming up for air.[2] It is *this interweaving of discourse and figuration* that Eliasian argument highlights, as reflected in the intertwining of advanced liberal discourse and the simultaneous disguise and sharpening of asymmetrical interdependencies.[3] As Elias argues, 'actions and ideas cannot be explained and understood if they are considered on their own; they need to be understood and explained within the framework of [interdependency networks]' (1970; 96).[4]

Such attentiveness to the figurational establishment of discourse appears comparatively downplayed within Foucauldian analysis (Newton, 1998). For instance, Nikolas Rose may have correctly identified the one-time neo-human relations imperative whereby the individual is 'to be *fulfilled in* work, now construed as an activity through which we *produce, discover and experience our selves*' (1990: 103, original and added emphasis). But this, and other work (e.g. Miller and Rose, 1990; Rose and Miller, 1992; Rose 1996) does not explain why many people have not experienced such 'fulfilment'—for instance, why 'self-discovery' through neo-human relations and neo-liberal discourse may feel closer to exploitation than empowerment. Explaining such experience remains difficult unless one is continually attentive to the *interdependency networks* in which the practices of management and social science discourse are developed and deployed (Newton, 1998). Within organizations, deployment generally occurs within asymmetrical interdependencies where, by virtue of their location within a hierarchy (Newton, 1996), certain agents, such as senior managers, are likely to have more of a say in the local enactment of particular 'new' management messages and techniques. In consequence, the language of empowerment may often be written within a managerialist text that exploits as much as empowers (e.g. asking employees to take far more responsibility and 'autonomy' for similar levels of pay).

We can explore this argument further by turning to work that treats management knowledge as 'fads and fashions'. An Eliasian perspective suggests that the existence of 'fads' and their success needs to be located within particular figurational contexts. For example, the faddishness of

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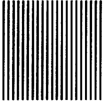

management occurs within interdependency networks characterized by *accelerating* mobility and change (Nowotny, 1994), where the search for the 'new model' becomes standardized in relation to not just products and services, but also ideas and techniques. Equally, faddishness needs to be situated within an accelerating consumption which reflects a pervasive marketization and de-regulation that *shifts interdependency network relations* by continually constructing them in terms of client, supplier, customer, competitor, etc. Most significantly, following Elias, the entrenchment of 'new' management practices within organizations needs to be understood in relation to the *asymmetries* of the interdependency networks in which they are enacted. Put simply, is it any coincidence that successful fads such as those of 'excellence' and BPR are 'managerialist' rather than 'critical' in their key assumptions? Given that organizations are composed of asymmetrical interdependency networks (based on organizational/professional hierarchy), it would be surprising if 'critical management' discourse were commonly adopted since it highlights such asymmetries. In contrast, managerialist discourse has the advantage of *rationalizing* organizational asymmetries through its implicit assumption that organizations are meritocracies that reward skill and achievement. For instance, the HRM language of careers, 'competencies', professional selection, evaluation, appraisal (etc.) is not just a means by which an employee is 'constituted' in some Foucauldian sense as a subject of HRM discourse. It is also a language of supposed meritocracy that studiously ignores the way in which selection, qualifications, competencies, appraisal (etc.) disguise the relation of career 'achievement' to the social advantage that derives from private schooling, prestigious higher education, etc. In other words, career advancement remains related to social and organizational inequality but is disguised through the meritocratic credentials of educational and professional achievement (Boudon, 1981). There is of course nothing new in such observations but they are worth restating since they emphasize how asymmetries are common features of interdependencies within *and* without organizations—and how new forms of organizational practice are established within such asymmetrical interdependencies. In this context, the advantage of Elias's work is his continual emphasis on the asymmetries of everyday life. From an Eliasian perspective, analysing the management and, in traditional terms, 'diffusion' of organizational knowledge does not just need to attend to the relation of subjects to discourse, but to the interdependency networks in which management discourse develops and is deployed, *and* the frequently asymmetrical form of such networks.

Elias, Marx and Labour Process Theory

The above argument raises the question of the potential relation of Elias to Marx and labour process theory. Though it is beyond the scope of the present paper to explore this issue in detail, it is possible to make some

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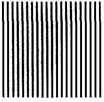

general observations. The first derives from the relation between Eliasian and Marxist argument. On the one hand, while studying at Heidelberg, Elias 'spent a great deal of time reading Marx' (Elias, 1994b: 35), and clearly shares the Marxist emphasis upon human existence as defined by social relations rather than an individual psychology. On the other hand, Elias is critical of the predominant reliance on economic rationality within Marxist argument, and is highly resistant to its dualistic assumptions. This remains significant to labour process theorists to the extent that they still exhibit a dualism which reduces the subjectivity of the employee to their economic category within the labour process, particularly where this is reduced to stereotyped class identities such as 'management' or 'worker' (O'Doherty and Willmott, 1998; Newton, 1999). Elias's strong anti-dualism made him resistant to such analysis. As Stephen Mennell notes:

> Although [Elias] always speaks with great respect of Marx's own pioneering contribution to understanding social development, Elias is highly critical of the one-sided causal weight which Marxists often attribute to narrowly economic forces. (Mennell, 1989: 65)

Though far from discounting the economic (e.g. Elias, 1983), Elias seeks to analyse social relations in less dualistic and restrictive terms. This is not simply through his emphasis that the 'monopolization of violence . . . plays no less a part as a source of power than the monopolization of the means of production' (Elias, 1987b: 230). It is also through the attempt to widen our understanding of the *interweaving* between consciousness and social relations through a broad analysis of our social selves within the context of shifting figurations (see above). This perspective has a tendency to challenge labour process theory, especially in its more orthodox form. For instance, though Elias portrays individualization and collectivization as far from a black and white issue, he nevertheless argues that the modern self has a far 'greater chance of individualization' (Elias, 1991a: 169). As I have argued elsewhere (Newton, 1999), such a position challenges labour process theorists who rely on a notion of collective subjectivity.

Yet such Eliasian critique can be in danger of obscuring the similarities between the position of Marx and Elias. In particular, as Robert van Krieken notes, Elias felt that Marx's emphasis on 'social relations as developing over time' had 'been overlooked by contemporary sociologists of knowledge' (1998: 138). Elias's emphasis on socio-genesis and the longue durée (see above) represents an attempt to underline the significance of a long-term historical perspective in a manner that appears sympathetic to Marx, yet critical of Marx's economic reductionism (Elias, 1971).

Elias and Actor-Network Theory

There is also considerable commonality between the image of the agent in Elias's work and that found in actor-network theory. As John Law

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comments, 'the explanatory attitude of [actor-network] writers is not so different from that of Norbert Elias' (1994: 113). Similarly, Michel Callon notes how the arguments of Elias, Granovetter and actor-network theory share a critique of the 'person closed in on himself—*Homo clausus*, to use Elias' expression' (Callon, 1999: 185, original emphasis). Elias's work can be seen to pre-date the stress upon networked agency in actor-network theory, and the need to attend to the plurality of interdependent agents who surround any decision—*Homines aperti*, in Elias's terms, or 'actor-worlds' in actor-network theory (Callon, 1986, 1999). Understanding organizations therefore means understanding such networks and the tensions between them. For Elias, networks are never static figurations. They are continually in flux, never fixed or easily predictable. To this extent, he also shares a similar perspective to the actor network stress on 'movement' and mobility (see below).

It is worth reminding ourselves of how radical an emphasis on networks is within organization studies. As this can easily be illustrated by opening almost any management textbook, it is worth taking a short detour in order to explore the *Homo clausus* language that still peppers management texts. Almost at random, I have selected a passage from a current management text. It describes a case study of GKN Hardy Spicer that is used to illustrate how new discursive practices come to be established within organizations. Given that this textbook is concerned with human resource management strategy, the case study focuses on the adoption of a new HRM practice at Hardy Spicer, namely 'team leadership'. The quotation below describes how Hardy Spicer came to imitate the team leadership practices of one of its sister companies, 'BRD':

> In 1988–1989 BRD (a local sister company of Hardy Spicer) had implemented the *team leader* concept under Tom Wood, who was then its managing director . . . *He had a strong belief in delegation* and that if you gave people ownership, it would release potential. At BRD, the foremen were seen as blocking that energy, *so BRD had got rid of the foreman.* In October 1990, Hardy Spicer followed suit, appointing team leaders and abolishing foremen across the whole factory. Since then, the team leader principle . . . has been *adopted wholesale.* (Hendry, 1995: 387, added emphasis)

This quotation illustrates how *Homo clausus* remains alive and well in management textbooks. In other words, if we look at this quotation, we see that organizational change is depicted as chiefly coming about through the seemingly independent, and 'closed', actions of one individual, namely Tom Wood. He appears as the key 'driver', since his actions at BRD are depicted as implicitly *causing* the adoption of the team leader 'principle' both at BRD, and later at its sister company, Hardy Spicer. It appears that it was his *personal* 'strong belief in delegation' that led to the 'wholesale' adoption of team leaders at BRD and Hardy Spicer, and the sacking of foremen.

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The above quotation is far from uncommon. Similar accounts remain littered throughout contemporary management textbooks. Their problem, whether from an Eliasian perspective or that of actor-network theory, is that they hide many of the interdependency processes through which movement and change take place. Within the Hardy Spicer/BRD case study, no consideration is given to the processes by which Tom Wood came to have a 'strong belief in delegation', etc., or why and how it was that this strong belief led to the adoption of team leaders at BRD and Hardy Spicer. Equally, sacking foremen appears as a straightforward process that does not need further explication. In other words, the interdependency networks in which Tom Wood is situated are treated as unproblematic even though this is a case study intended to teach students how *change* in HRM practice occurs. Yet, from an Eliasian perspective, the interdependency networks surrounding BRD and Hardy Spicer contain many of the defining points through which movement and change are enacted—such as those relating to professional and education networks (interdependencies with professional organizations, business schools, management consultancies, etc.), supplier and client networks, intra-organizational networks, interdependencies with government agencies, etc. . . . Understanding change, such as that within organizations, means understanding the 'struggles that keep [the] whole interdependent network *in motion*' (Elias, 1994a: 457, added emphasis). Without attending to such networks, it is impossible to understand how Tom Wood came to have a 'strong belief in delegation'. Similarly, without attending to the asymmetries of such interdependencies, we cannot explain how foremen are sacked.

A similar critique would proceed from actor-network theorists who might want to know how Tom Wood was *translated* into a champion of delegation, and the *mobile* networks through which this belief might further translate human resource management practice (albeit that this story might be criticized for implying an overly socialized account of translation). From an ANT perspective, much of the traditional language of organization studies is based on static concepts that remain 'analytically isolated' (Lee and Hassard, 1999: 399). For example, questions are asked such as 'how effectively are the [organizational] goals being pursued?' *rather than* questions such as how do goals "mobilize" and become "mobilized" ' (Lee and Hassard, 1999: 399–400). This emphasis on 'movement' (Latour, 1999: 17) means that actor-network theory, like the work of Elias, remains radical in its critique of much of the narrative through which organizations, and organizational change, are explained in contemporary management texts. Yet actor-network theory and Elias differ in two critical aspects. The first comes from the emphasis that Elias places on the asymmetries within interdependency networks, an emphasis that stands in some contrast to the arguments of Michel Callon and Bruno Latour. As Zygmunt Bauman notes:

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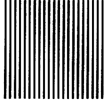

> [Elias's] idea of '[inter]dependency networks' lifts into prominence the potential *asymmetry* of the location within figuration. If interdependency constrains the actors, it constrains actors in different ways. (1989: 41, added emphasis)

We can see Elias's emphasis upon asymmetry in a variety of aspects of his work. For example, it is central to his analysis of courtly society, symbolized by the asymmetry between monarch and courtier, and his games models which provide an explicit methodology for analysing asymmetries (Elias, 1970). Together, such analytical and theoretical emphases provide a basis that draws attention to the asymmetries of organizational life, such as those of organizational structure or professional hierarchy (Law, 1994), or those that condition organizational experience (as witnessed in the interdependent asymmetries surrounding gender, ethnicity, class, age, etc., or those that enable foremen to be fired).[5] Through Elias's theorizing, one therefore has a basis for the critical analysis of organizations.

Though such an orientation is not entirely lacking in actor-network theory, it often remains rather subdued. As I have argued elsewhere (Newton, 1999), actor-network theory tends to dull critical analysis by remaining insufficiently attentive to the significance of asymmetries. For instance, if an actor appears as a particularly passive or 'docile' agent, this is explained by Callon as the consequence of factors such as the 'standardization' of actor networks (1991: 151). It seems odd that Callon does not consider the possibility that actor docility may be a result of asymmetries of inequality between different actors which *force* passivity on to certain actors by virtue of their location within an interdependency network (Newton, 1996, 1999).

Another key difference between actor-network theory and Elias comes from their conceptualization of agency. In particular, the former has a greater stress on the non-human actor through its desire to attain a generalized symmetry between the natural and the social (Callon, 1986). Though this has the advantage of avoiding a privileged position with respect to the traditional divide between 'nature' and 'society', it is open to the critique that this attempt to circumvent such issues is less than entirely successful. As Collins and Yearley argue, the creation of a seeming symmetry between human and non-human agents is a *social* process 'very much in the hands of the analysts' (1992: 313). Furthermore, many of the non-human entities which Michel Callon and Bruno Latour emphasize in their desire for symmetry—speed-bumps, door-openers, hotel keys and so on—are *stand-ins* for humans (i.e. stand-ins for, say, 'policemen and porters'). In consequence, they could still be read as supporting the conventional asymmetrical view which ascribes primacy to the human since such non-human objects merely reflect the human capacity for tools and technology, the development and deployment of which remain a strongly human social process.

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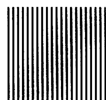

Actor-network theorists may object that actor-network theory 'was never a theory of what the social is made of' and was not designed 'to explain the behaviour of social actors' (Latour, 1999: 19). They sought to avoid the seeming dead ends of grand debates such as those between agency and structure, 'Nature' and 'Society', realism and constructionism. They sought a 'bypassing strategy' (Latour, 1999: 17). Yet the question arises as to how much the desire to elide the pitfalls of such debates only re-invokes rather than displaces them. For instance, in spite of Callon and Latour's desire to maintain a 'generalized symmetry' between the human and the non-human, their analyses exhibit a bias towards the latter. As I have argued elsewhere (Newton, 1999), this slant is revealed through analyses which deconstruct the historical and contemporary networks which surround the 'building' of the non-human, but frequently ignore those associated with the human. In particular, there is little attention to the Eliasian interest in the lengthy historical interdependency networks that condition the practical and discursive consciousness of human beings—such as those relating to the socio-emotional restraint of courtly society, or those associated with the social development of the consciousness of time (see above). To use the terminology of actor-network theory, human beings have a tendency to become 'black-boxed' within Latour and Callon's analyses. Whereas they exhibit meticulous attention to the historical networks that surround the development of, say, the Kodak automatic camera (e.g. Latour, 1987, 1991), they do not show a similar concern with the interdependency networks that condition human action. Though they attend to how humans act in relation to technology, their analyses tend to represent people as *predictable* parts of the network, whose actions can be taken for granted within a particular network configuration. In actor network terms, the significance of the social is downplayed through being 'punctualized' (Callon, 1991).

It remains ironic that, although Latour and Callon severely question the image of an independent sovereign self, or a 'closed box', they do not examine the networks through which that sense of independence has been achieved. In Elias's terms, they fail to study how a human actor achieves a sense of being an independent 'black-boxed' *Homo clausus* because interdependency networks are historically obscured and in consequence seem part of our intimate subjectivity. As noted above, we tend to experience our emotions as 'natural', 'inevitable' or even purely 'biological' because the historical networks in which emotion codes have socio-genetically formed are concealed from us. In other words, we have a marked tendency to view our situation 'from the hundredth floor' (see above). From an Eliasian perspective, we need to see emotion, subjectivity and organization as *developing within particular figurational contexts*. In this context, it appears lopsided to attend to the development of technology without attending equally to its interweaving with the development of human sociality and subjectivity. Actor network theorists might well respond to such implicit critique through further celebration

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of their elision (repression?) of the social (e.g. Latour, 1999; Callon, 1999). Yet this runs the risk of re-invoking rather than eliding dualisms between the technology and the social, 'Nature' and 'Society', etc., as epitomized by the acerbic correspondence between Callon and Latour (1992) and Collins and Yearley (1992).

In common with the desires of actor network theorists, Elias seeks to avoid dualities between nature and culture, and show how 'nature, society and individuals are embedded in each other and are interdependent (Elias, 1992: 16, quoted in Urry, 2000: 119; cf. Adam, 1990: 18). Yet, for Elias, this does not represent an attempt to resolve such dualisms through elision and 'bypassing strategies' but merely by emphasizing that supposed dualisms are always traversed by interdependency networks. His studies of courtly society emphasize how the emotion codes of individual courtiers were interwoven with, in conventional terms, the social 'structures' of royal courts, and how, in Eliasian terms, these latter 'figurations' are themselves interwoven with the monopolization of violence in European states etc. There are no 'walls' between 'structures' and the 'self', 'macro' and 'micro', or the present and the past, since interdependency networks continuously traverse time and space across 'nature' and 'society' (Elias, 1991b).

Elias and Organizational Theory: Summary

The work of Elias has a number of points of contact with, and divergence from, current organizational theory. It is sympathetic to the Foucauldian interest in discourse, knowledge and subjectivity, but stresses the need to locate management practices, 'past' and 'new', within interdependency networks that are often characterized by asymmetry. Elias's broad argument has much in common with the Marxist emphasis upon the social and the historical, yet resists its economic reductionism. As Law and Callon note, there are also notable parallels between the positions of actor-network theory and Elias, particularly through their mutual emphasis on networks and their mutual embrace of *Homines aperti*. In addition, Elias and actor network theorists share an antagonism towards dualisms, particularly that relating to 'nature' and 'society' (Newton, 2000a). Yet Elias differs in his attention to the figurational contexts in which *Homo clausus*, and other aspects of human subjectivity, have historically developed. At the same time, he places a greater emphasis on the significance of asymmetries within human interdependency networks. These appear as central to his conceptualization of power and power 'games'.

The above review is by no means comprehensive. Links to other organizational theories can be made, such as institutional theory (see Iterson et al., this symposium) and chaos and complexity theory (through the shared emphasis on unintended order).[6] The above review is thus merely *indicative* of the salience of Elias to existing organizational

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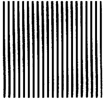

theory, and of the way in which his work questions and re-frames such theory. In the next section of this paper, I will explore this significance further through reference to current fields of organizational inquiry and analysis.

Elias and Organizational Analysis

In what follows, I will use brief illustrations in order to give some feel for the breadth of organizational analysis to which Eliasian argument is relevant.

Strategy and Organizational Change

Eliasian argument is particularly relevant to studies of strategy because of Elias's stress upon the frequently unplanned nature of ordering and change. This stress implies that strategic change is always likely to be a fraught process because strategic 'outcomes' often represent the interweaving of action and argument between numerous 'players', such as competitors, clients, suppliers, different professional groupings, government agencies, etc. In this respect, Elias's work appears strongly critical of the assumptions underlying the 'classical' approaches to strategy associated with the 'rational planning' school (Mintzberg, 1989; Whittington, 1993). Yet, though Eliasian argument emphasizes the difficulty of strategic change, Elias's work is not entirely dismissive of the possibility of strategically planned change. Instead, his 'game models' can provide a methodological basis to assess the likelihood of strategies being affected in a 'deliberate/planned' rather than 'emergent' manner.

Studies of strategy can also be informed by Elias's work on time and his stress on the need for a temporal perspective. Strategic change can be seen as a matter of temporal orientation (Das, 1991, 1993; Hay and Usunier, 1993; Ramaprasad and Stone, 1992), whether we can control the future (through 'rational planning'), or must adapt to the present (through 'learning', 'emergent strategy', 'incrementalism' and 'trial and error'), or are chiefly constrained by the past (because present strategies are 'embedded' within financial, legal, educational and cultural 'systems' which have developed slowly in the past and are often resistant to present change [Whittington, 1993, 1994]). Elias's argument straddles these temporal orientations. The future is seen as dependent on present power balances which are themselves a product of past interweaving. For instance, strategies occur within existing figurations (composed of competitor, client, supplier, government, etc. networks) which themselves represent the interwoven developments of past interdependency 'games'. More generally, because a concern with time runs through much of Elias's work, it provides a means to explore time in relation to ordering and strategy.

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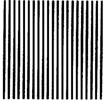

Organizations and the Natural Environment

Just as Elias's work is relevant to strategy, it can also inform consideration of ecological and environmental strategy (Newton, 2000b). This can be briefly illustrated by reference to the ecological problems which derive from our infatuation with cars and automobiles (and the contemporary 'tragedy of the commons' which cars represent). In particular, the ecological hazards of car use can be seen to reflect the *unplanned* interdependencies that are highlighted by Elias. As Elias stresses, 'underlying all *intended* interactions of human beings is their *unintended* interdependence' (Elias, 1969: 143). Cars were *intended* to deliver a previously undreamt promise of personal mobility. Yet they have also delivered traffic jams, air and noise pollution, etc. as a consequence of the *unintended interdependence* of millions of 'autonomous' car users. This specific example neatly corresponds to Eliasian theorizing and is illustrative of the more general way in which Elias's concern with order and ordering is relevant to understanding the difficulties of ecologically re-ordering organizations and societies (Newton, 2000b).

Emotion in Organizations

Once again, I can only touch on the relevance of Eliasian work to this field of analysis. One feature of Eliasian study is the way in which it underlines the need to see emotion within a historical (Elias, 1983, 1994a; Newton, 1997, 2000c; Kieser, 1998) and evolutionary context (Elias, 1991b, 1992). Codes of emotional engagement within organizations do not occur in some ahistorical vacuum but instead have emerged in relation to the changing figurations associated with monarchy, the Enlightenment, industrialization and professionalization.[7] It follows that it can be misleading to restrict our understanding of emotion just to contemporary or 20th-century analysis. For instance, contra Hochschild (1983), emotional labour is not largely a 20th-century phenomenon since the disguise and dissembling of emotion was a routine accomplishment amongst earlier groups, such as courtiers (Wouters, 1989; Newton, 1997). More generally, Eliasian perspectives draw attention to the need to see emotional display as interwoven with changing figurational contexts. Elias illustrates this most graphically in relation to court society but he also discusses the emotion codes of bourgeois and industrial society (Elias, 1983), as have other writers influenced by him (Morgan, 1994; Newton, 1997; Kieser, 1998). This Eliasian stress on the significance of the historical development of emotions does not imply, however, that contemporary analysis is irrelevant. Though emotion codes have socio-historically developed, they are nevertheless influenced by contemporary interdependencies such as those of organizations. For instance, what Hochschild (1983) calls 'feeling rules' represent the refashioning of pre-existent emotion codes within the shifting interdependencies of accelerating commercialization (Newton, 1997). As Cas Wouters (1986) argues,

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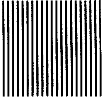

the 20th century has also accelerated the informalization of emotion codes, a social development whereby emotional control is sharpened, yet simultaneously appears more 'relaxed'.

Body and Organization

Running throughout Elias's work is a concern with the body and its significance to human development. For Elias, as with Foucault, the body is centrally implicated in, and inseparable from, changing power relations, and the illustration of this interrelationship is central to the first part of *The Civilizing Process*. This and other work (e.g. Elias, 1991b) predates *and* extends current debate about the body (Williams and Bendelow, 1998; Burkitt, 1999). In consequence, his argument is of direct relevance to those addressing the body in organizational settings (Hassard et al., 2000). In addition, it is of particular interest to the ontological and epistemological tensions between social constructionist, corporeal and biological treatments of the body because of the way in which Elias erodes conventional distinctions between biology and sociology (Newton, 2001).

Organizations and Violence

Eliasian study draws attention to the close interrelation between organizations and violence. For instance, Wilbert van Vree (1999) re-frames our understanding of organizational processes through a unique Eliasian study of meetings. In a fashion not entirely dissimilar to Elias's *The Civilizing Process,* van Vree presents a detailed historical analysis of meetings and their significance for the containment of violence. As meetings historically emerged, 'people who previously competed freely with each other were compelled to set aside the use of force and to fight exclusively verbal battles in meetings' (van Vree, 1999: 7). Van Vree notes how slight variation in the 'manners' deemed appropriate to contemporary meetings can, as with court etiquette or parliamentary manners, be of considerable significance to power balances (see also Smith's paper in this symposium).

Willem Mastenbroek (1993, 1999) also draws on historical analysis in his Eliasian work on negotiation and bargaining. His studies emphasize the intimate relation between negotiation processes and historically changing codes of emotion, and the need to understand negotiation in relation to conflict and violence. Together, studies such those of van Vree and Mastenbroek illustrate the relevance of an Eliasian framework to understanding violence and organization.

Knowledge and Discourse

Elias draws attention to the way in which discourse develops within changing figurational contexts. Firstly, as noted above, such contexts are likely to consist of asymmetrical interdependency networks as witnessed in organizations through structural and professional hierarchies. In under-

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standing the management and deployment of new management practices, an Eliasian perspective therefore draws our attention to the way in which new practices are employed within existing asymmetries, such as those surrounding employers/shareholders and employees, or producers and clients (see above). Secondly, Elias was also concerned with the broader relation between discourse and figuration; how, say, Copernican or Cartesian or Freudian thought developed within particular figurational settings (Elias, 1991a). Applying this perspective to organizational analysis, we can explore the relation between figurational change and developments in management and organizational discourse. For instance, elsewhere, I have explored the relation between the 'greater chance of individualization' (Elias, 1991a: 169) afforded in many contemporary societies and the development of discourse relating to organizational and corporate culture (Newton, 1999). Figurational analysis of other discursive developments might be undertaken, such as those relating to total quality management or business process re-engineering. The promise of such analyses lies in their ability to draw attention to the changing interdependency webs within which discursive developments are established.

Globalization

Though in need of extension, Elias nevertheless provides a framework by which to analyse globalization processes as 'the outcome of struggles between the figuration of interdependent and competing nation-states' (Featherstone and Lash, 1995: 2). As Victor Roudometof and Roland Robertson note, Elias is relevant to work on globalization because he provides a means to compare between different global networks:

> The novel character of [the Eliasian] approach rests on the connections established between changes in the economic network (European feudalism), political network (interstate conflict), military network (internal pacification via court societies), and changes in the cultural-ideological network (personality development and sociogenetic processes involving detachment from 'passions' and the promotion of interest and rationality). (1995: 281)

As the above quotation suggests, an Eliasian interpretation also has the advantage of relating globalization processes to changes in subjectivity. As Mike Featherstone further observes:

> As Elias indicates in his synopsis to *The Civilizing Process* the creation of larger nation-states and blocs and the nature of the power balances, interdependencies and linkages between and across them will influence the types of identity formation and personality structure which develops in various parts of the world. (1995: 135–6, quoted in Maguire, 1999: 50)

Finally, Elias's work also guards against the notion that there is likely to be any linear or straightforward globalization process. As Joseph Maguire notes, 'for [Eliasians], globalization processes have a blind, unplanned dimension to them and a relative autonomy from the intentions of

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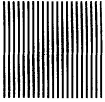

specific groups of people' (1999: 40). It is possible to qualify this argument since Elias's game models do point to certain situations where planned strategies might have a greater likelihood of being effected. Yet the general Eliasian point is to be welcomed in guarding against the vision of uniform or deterministic globalization processes and the belief that global strategies can be easily implemented, whether they reflect economic desires (e.g. Marxist, neo-liberal), religious ambitions (Barber, 1995), or ecological concerns to protect the natural environment (Yearley, 1996).

Industrial Relations and Collective Bargaining

As Raymond Boudon notes, 'trade union conflicts offer the sociologist an opportunity to analyse *interdependent* systems' (1981: 65, added emphasis).[8] In the case of Elias's work, we have a basis to relate the micro-analytical encounters of collective bargaining to the meso- and macro-changes that surround industrial relations (such as the effect of trade union legislation on the power balance between employers and trade unions). This is most clearly seen in Elias's game models, which appear directly relevant to the analysis of collective bargaining. On the one hand, Elias's 'two-person games' provide a means of analysing the power balances between a single employer and a trade union body (Elias, 1970: 81–2). On the other hand, his multi-person, multi-level games could be used to explore the interdependencies between employers, trade unions and the State. The use of Elias's game models in this manner holds particular promise if embedded within his wider theorizing. Eliasian study has also been applied by Willem Mastenbroek to analysing negotiation processes in a variety of contexts (e.g. Mastenbroek, 1993).

Organization and History

Elias's work is also relevant to those concerned with the historical and genealogical development of organizational discourse. Current historical work influenced by Elias underlines how the association between organization and subjectivity is *not* just a 20th century phenomenon (as exampled by Taylorism, human and neo-human relations, 'OD', 'excellence', etc.) but rather has characterized the *earliest* forms of organization (Kieser, 1998, Newton, 2000c). At the same time, such studies pose the question of whether, and how, contemporary organizations and contemporary subjectivities relate to earlier historical developments, a subject directly addressed by Ad van Iterson, Willem Mastenbroek and Joseph Soeters in the present symposium.

Though such analyses illustrate the interest in historically situating organization studies, they nevertheless need to be approached with some circumspection. For, in constructing such Eliasian analysis, one must be cautious about projecting overly continuous or linear histories, particularly since Elias does exhibit a bias towards continuity (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). That said, just as one must question the extent to which

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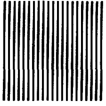

one can assume 'total' or linear continuity, one must also be somewhat wary of the Foucauldian tendency towards seeing history as discontinuity, disjuncture and reversal (Baert, 1998; Newton, 2000c).

The above examples illustrate the potential relevance of Elias to organizational analysis, much of which remains relatively unexplored. These examples are by no means exhaustive, and Elias's work highlights a number of other issues. For instance, it underscores the difficulty of evaluating organizational interventions when any 'outcomes' are likely to represent the interweaving between interventions and other organizational processes. Equally, his work is relevant to organizational structure, re-structuring, and the difficulties posed by organizational differentiation and integration (a theme addressed in the paper in this symposium by van Iterson et al.). In sum, these examples are merely indicative of the interest of Elias to organization study.

Limitations of Eliasian Analysis

It is beyond the scope of an introductory paper to provide a detailed consideration of limitations with Eliasian analysis. For the present I merely wish to focus on two issues.

A central question regarding Elias is whether he reduces our subjectivity in a similar fashion to the way in which Marx is accused of economic reductionism. Eliasians note that, although Elias was sympathetic to Marx's long-term temporal perspective, he was wary of Marx's principle emphasis upon the economics of a particular historical period (see above). As Stephen Mennell puts it, Elias felt that 'in [Marx's] hands, a short-term economic theory was transformed into a long-term sociological theory' (1989: 185). Yet exactly the same kind of critique is made of Elias, except that the charge is one of psychological rather than economic reductionism. Thus Nikolas Rose asserts that 'Elias . . . requires us to adopt a recent historical [Freudian] truth about the human being . . . as the universal basis for investigating the historicity of being human' (Rose, 1996: 36). With his emphasis upon psychological restraint and internal control, from courtly society to the present day, it is easy to crudely place Eliasian argument within such Freudian parameters (Breuer, 1991). In Freudian parlance, Elias appears to describe how an unrestrained id (such as that of warring chieftains) became subject to the tensions implicit in the id's relation to the ego and superego, as restraint became an internalized and 'natural' aspect of subjectivity (such as with courtiers). These similarities lead Rose to, in effect, assert that Elias transforms a short-term psychological theory, namely that of Freud, into a long-term sociological theory.

In general terms, this critique seems unwarranted since the broad argument of Elias's work is that discursive developments must be situated in their figurational context. In other words, just as Elias (1991a, 1992) shows how Copernican or Cartesian discourse, or arguments about

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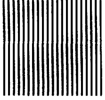

time, need to be seen within their particular figurational 'episode', so does he portray the rise of Freudian psychology as figurationally situated within the setting of the royal court. The need for restraint and self-censoring arose not because these psychological characteristics are timeless but because courtly society demanded a greater self-restraint and control than the relatively unfettered emotional and behavioural expression afforded to knights within their previously warring fiefdoms. Elias (1983) further argues that behavioural and emotional restraint were later encouraged by the self-consciousness of urban society (conditioned by the necessity to interact and 'be hospitable' to a potentially vast array of others) and by the need for a polished public face within employment and professional settings (cf. Goffman, etc.). In sum, Elias suggests that we lie in the shadow of Freud because of particular figurational developments rather than because Freud identified our universal and timeless psychology. Rose's critique of Elias does not therefore appear as substantiated.

However, there is a greater complexity to these arguments. Firstly, Elias continuously uses a language that is reminiscent of Freud, thereby creating the impression that Freudian discourse is central to his argument. For some, this appears as unfortunate, though capable of correction. Thus Robert van Krieken argues that reference to restraint 'implies the existence of some presocial nature' (1998: 133), which was not Elias's intention. Consequently, van Krieken suggests that reference to 'discipline' rather than restraint would be more appropriate since it captures 'the positive, productive aspects of the effects of social figurations on human habitus' (1998: 133). Yet the issue here is not just about language but about different forms of social discipline. As noted above, Elias asserts that 'the closer the web of interdependencies becomes in which the individual is enmeshed . . . the greater is the social advantage of those able to moderate their affects' (1994a: 448). Following Elias, modernity and late modernity are characterized by increasingly complex interdependency webs, and thereby increased affect moderation and restraint. Freudian discourse can be seen to result from the tensions of maintaining such restraint within increasingly complex modern interdependencies. Yet the question arises as to whether Elias is right to argue that there is a strong correlation between complex interdependencies and a disciplined subjectivity. It is certainly not too difficult to think of exceptions to this case. For instance, many complex networks are currently disembedded in time and space, particularly those of a monetary and economic variety. Most individuals are engaged in highly complex economic interdependency webs, yet are blissfully unaware or unconcerned at their predicament. For instance, I will probably never meet the people who grew the cotton that I wear, or the bananas that I eat. The question thus arises as to whether people partly experience reduced social discipline as a consequence of lengthening interdependencies (Duerr, 1990, 1993).

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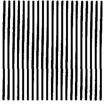

To put this another way, the problem is that Elias tends to conflate different forms of discipline. He implies that the personal, localized, face-to-face restraint of the courtier is substantially equivalent to the more distanciated examples of social discipline such as that of time-keeping (Elias, 1994a: 457), or that needed to drive a car (Elias, 1994a: 446). In the former case, we have the courtier who is 'master of his gestures, his eyes, his face; he is deep and impenetrable' (La Bruyère, 1890: 112, quoted, though with a different translation, in Elias, 1994a: 476). In the latter, we have socially sanctioned means of co-ordination within complex interdependencies that necessitate activities such as time-keeping or careful driving. Yet this is hardly the same as the courtly requirement to dissemble and be 'impenetrable'. There are notable differences in such disciplines, the one, face-to-face and localized, the other, more temporally and/or spatially distanciated. Elias tends to run together these kinds of discipline. But are they really the same? Doesn't individualization, and its release from the 'finely meshed social webs' (Duerr, 1993: 26, quoted in van Krieken, 1998: 123) of the medieval village, produce its own discipline—that of living more closely with the self. Elias of course attends in detail to the spread of individualization where 'the main burden of shaping life together . . . now lies on the shoulders of the individuals concerned' (Elias, 1996: 37). But can one say that this shift still produces essentially similar kinds of discipline, such as the intensification of self-restraint summarized in Wouters and Elias's reference to informalization? Isn't something very different going on, as reflected in the attention to managing the self that is witnessed in, say, Foucault? In other words, does Elias's bias toward historical continuity mean that he tends to see an intensification of discipline rather a significant shift, or even Foucauldian 'rupture', in its form?

Could we not project another history of social discipline which is not just to do with the greater complexity of interdependency networks but with their changing form—such as the shift to more time–space distanciated networks? Elias is very much aware of the latter networks, but he does not significantly differentiate their codes of discipline from the more intense face to face setting of court society. This is a problem because, as Duerr implies, distanciated networks can create 'opportunities for freedom' (Duerr, 1990: 24; quoted in van Krieken, 1998: 122) as much as restraints. Or as Nicos Mouzelis puts it, 'certain types of interdependence are more conducive to the emotional controls Elias speaks of than others' (1995: 73).

In sum, the suggestion that Elias reduces the social world to a (Freudian) psychological argument does seem too simplistic. Yet questions remain as to how well Elias elaborated the temporal and spatial contingencies that may affect the relation between interdependency and subjectivity. The criticism I have made above does not however question the central Eliasian assertion that we need to envision our subjectivity and power

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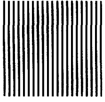

relations as they are interwoven within changing interdependency networks. My critique questions the form of this relation, not its substance.[9]

Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to illustrate some of the breadth of Eliasian argument and the way in which it interrelates with current areas of organizational theory and analysis. His work has clear points of contact with Marxist argument, Foucauldian study and actor-network theory. It is of particular interest because of the way in which it re-interprets such argument, through challenging the economic reductionist tendencies of neo-Marxist work, questioning the relation of the subject to discourse within Foucauldian analysis, and doubting the form and degree of symmetry that is presented in actor-network theory.

Though in need of further development, Elias's work is relevant to varied fields of organizational analysis, such as those of history and genealogy, organizational strategy and change, organizations and the natural environment, the management of knowledge, globalization, etc. Eliasian analysis both connects with, yet reinterprets such work through, say, questioning the feasibility of strategic economic or ecological change, or stressing the asymmetries surrounding the deployment of new management fads and practices, or emphasizing the need to see organization theory as representing particular stances on time and temporality.

Finally, as noted in the introductory editorial, the concern of this symposium is both to illustrate Eliasian argument, and to explore its limitations. In the present case, I have sought to question the argument that Elias is guilty of psychological reductionism, yet debate the association that he asserts between interdependency complexity/length and disciplined subjectivity. As I have noted elsewhere (Newton, 1999), Elias's work contains a tension between a modernist vision of order and a (loosely) postmodern sense of disorder and fragmentation. Its irony is that, although he stresses the disorder that results from the interweaving of argument and action, he nevertheless secretes sympathies for a modernist vision that does not merely stress order, but a particular direction and form of order. Not surprisingly it is in the latter area where he most opens himself to critique since one can question both the timing of that order (see van Iterson et al., this symposium), its circumference and adequacy (see Dopson's reference to Layder and Pels, this symposium), and the form and direction which it takes (see Smith, this symposium).

Notes

1 Such an argument is of course reminiscent of the work of later writers such as Foucault and Bourdieu. Yet, as will be noted below, there are differences between the emphases of Elias, Foucault and Foucauldians (van Krieken, 1990; Burkitt, 1993; Smith, 1999; Newton, 1999). In addition, through his emphasis upon figurational *change* and flux, Elias is less open to the charges

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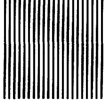

of determinism that have been levelled at writers such as Bourdieu (e.g. Alexander, 1995).

2 This little example may perhaps too easily accept the Foucauldian elevation of advanced liberalism (e.g. Miller and Rose, 1990; Rose and Miller, 1992), but it serves for illustrative purposes.

3 There is some similarity here with the work of Norman Fairclough. Though Fairclough's terms of reference are clearly different, his concepts such as the 'technologization of discourse' (1995: 91) are based on the argument that discursive practices are frequently deployed within conditions of political asymmetry.

4 Elias provides a variety of illustrations of this interweaving of discourse and figuration, from the relation of Copernican thought to the breakdown in the church's monopoly (Elias, 1991a), to that of Freudian argument and the 'shadow' of court society (Elias, 1994a), to that of the Cartesian consciousness of the self within the figurational context of developing industrialization and urbanization (Elias, 1991a; Burkitt, 1994).

5 Elias does note, however, that longer and more differentiated chains of interdependence have had the effect of reducing power differentials and a 'relative levelling out of power balances between the rungs of the hierarchy' (Mennell, 1989: 109). Yet, as Mennell also notes (1989: 124), this does not mean that asymmetries are necessarily destined to disappear since new interdependencies create new inequalities.

6 Eliasian work does not, however, suffer from the questionable application of natural science models that is inherent in the social science application of chaos and complexity theory (Chia, 1998; Matheson and Kirchhoff, 1997).

7 For instance, the separation of emotion codes between public/organizational and private settings (Newton, 1995) needs to be seen in relation to the development of merchant and industrial society since it allowed an individual to withdraw from the 'glare of public life' (Elias, 1983: 115). Elias further argues that, by the time of 'bourgeois mass society', '*the professional sphere is the primary area in which social constraints and formative tendencies impinge on people*' (1983: 115–16, original emphasis).

8 There are definite similarities between the work of Elias and the later studies of Raymond Boudon. Most notably, they both not only emphasize interdependencies but also stress how such interdependencies often produce unplanned outcomes (where 'agents of the system produce collective phenomena which are, as such, not wanted by these agents' [Boudon, 1981: 59]). However, in comparison to Elias, Boudon's work can appear somewhat mechanistic and static, lacking the sense of movement and change of Eliasian concepts such as figuration. Yet, in spite of such differences of emphasis, Boudon's work contains a number of theoretical and analytical examples that are of relevance to Eliasian study.

9 For more wide-ranging reviews of existing critique, readers are recommended to consult Mennell (1989), van Krieken (1998) and Smith (2000).

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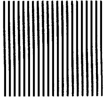

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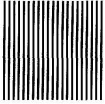

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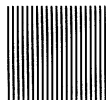

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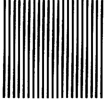

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Tim Newton is a Reader at the University of Exeter. He is presently engaged on research related to social and organization theory; sociology, biology and evolution; emotion, the body and health; the historical development of credit and commercialization; organizations and the natural environment; organization studies. **Address:** School of Business and Economics, Streatham Court, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4PU, UK [email: T.J.Newton@exeter.ac.uk]

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