

Figurations

Newsletter of the Norbert Elias Foundation

■ EDITORS' NOTES

- Richard Kilminster reports marking a student essay in which it was stated that against the model of 'homo clausus' Elias counterposed a model of 'homines aperiatis' [sic]. We know from conferences that figurationists like a drink, but ...
- Norman Rosenthal, Exhibitions Secretary at the Royal Academy of Arts, London, received an honorary doctorate from his *alma mater*, the University of Leicester, on 11 July 2007, and in his response he recalled that: 'Leicester in some ways was where my life started, in all sorts of ways. I had incredible teaching here. Not only in the History Department, though that was the subject that I read ... There were extraordinary people here and in the Sociology Department, Ilya Neustadt and the legendary Norbert Elias, whom some of you will know, was also teaching here. It's very little known that this man who is now a legend all over the world – in the United States, in Germany, in France – as a refugee spent his life here and wrote many of his books here. Leicester was in a certain sense a great intellectual centre, very much through him, and through many other people who were there.' We believe that Norman assisted Elias in mounting the exhibition of his collection of African art at the Leicester City Art Gallery in 1970.
- Readers' attention is drawn to the calls for papers for two important conferences in the autumn of 2007, one in Marbach marking the completion of the publication of the Elias *Gesammelte Schriften* by Suhrkamp, and the other in Frankfurt on Elias and American Studies.

■ FROM THE NORBERT ELIAS FOUNDATION

Peter Rudolf Gleichmann,
1932–2006

We are sad to report the death of Peter Gleichmann, Professor of Sociology at the University of Hannover, one of the principal advocates in Germany of the ideas of Norbert Elias and one of the editors – along with Johan Goudsblom and Hermann Korte – of *Human Figurations*, the *Festschrift* that marked Elias's eightieth birthday in 1977. The news reached us just as this issue of *Figurations* was being compiled. Hans-Peter Waldhoff had already contributed a note about the volume of Peter's

writings that he has edited. Sadly, Peter died just before he was able to see a finished copy of the book. An obituary will appear in *Figurations* 27.

Fifth Norbert Elias Prize

The fifth Norbert Elias Prize will be awarded in 2007. The Prize consists in a sum of €1,000 and it will be awarded to the author of a significant *first* major book published *between 1 January 2005 and 31 December 2006*.

In previous years, the Prize has been reserved for European authors. On this occasion, the Board of the Elias Foundation has decided to open the prize to

authors from other continents.

The Prize is awarded 'in commemoration of the sociologist Norbert Elias (1897–1990), whose writings, at once theoretical and empirical, boldly crossed disciplinary boundaries in the social sciences to develop a long-term perspective on the patterns of interdependence which human beings weave together'. This does not mean, however, that the prize-winning book will necessarily be directly inspired by Elias's own work.

Previous winners of the Elias Prize have been:

1999 David Lepoutre, *Coeur de banlieue: Codes, rites et langages* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1997)

2001 Wilbert van Vree, *Meetings, Manners and Civilisation* (London: University of Leicester Press, 1999)

2003 Nikola Tietze, *Islamische Identitäten: Formen muslimischer Religiosität junger Männer in Deutschland und Frankreich* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001)

2005 Jason Hughes, *Learning to Smoke: Tobacco Use in the West* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003)

For the 2007 prize, the jury will consist of three previous winners of the prize, under the chairmanship of Wilbert van Vree, with Stephen Menzell representing the Board of the Elias Foundation.

Nominations for the prize should be sent to Saskia Visser, Secretary to the Norbert Elias Foundation, J.J. Viotstraat 13, 1071 JM Amsterdam, The Netherlands, by 31 March 2007.

For books in languages other than English, French and German, please supply a brief outline of the nominated book.

Elias-I Email Discussion List

Kitty Roukens, moderator of the Elias-I discussion list has a new email address: roukens@uva.nl. Although SISWO has now been wound up, Kitty can still be reached (Mondays to Thursdays) at its old address, Plantage Muidersgracht 4, 1018 TV Amsterdam, tel. +31-20-527 0620.

To subscribe to the list, simply send an email to: LISTSERV@NIC.SURFNET.NL with the command: SUBSCRIBE ELIAS-I in the subject line.

For further details of the list, see: <http://www.lsoft.com/scripts/wl.exe?SL1=ELIAS-I&H=NIC.SURFNET.NL>.

■ IS ANOTHER WORLD POSSIBLE? SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON CONTEMPORARY POLITICS

Frances Fox Piven, President of the American Sociological Association

2007, wrote the following 'Thema Statement' for her year of office, and we thought it would be of interest to (and cheering for) readers of *Figurations*.

Intellectuals in the West have long believed that progress was inevitable, while having vastly different ideas about how and why progress would occur. Whether their confidence was in revolution or parliaments or technology, it was generally assumed that societies would become more just and more prosperous, and that this prosperity would be more widely shared. No more. Alarming trends are unfolding in the twenty-first century that threaten confidence in a better future, or even in any future at all.

Sociology emerged in the nineteenth century, as the very idea of society came into focus by thinkers attempting to understand the wrenching changes that accompanied industrialisation and urbanisation. These changes, and the large scale but also intimate miseries that often came in their wake, illuminated the importance of big social processes and the big institutional structures that gave rise to them. They also directed attention to the 'social question', the new patterns of inequality, hardship and disorganisation that society was creating. The penetrating insights of Durkheim and Marx, Weber and Simmel, as well as the path-breaking empirical work of the early American sociologists who focused on social problems, reflected their immersion in the life of their societies, and their commitment to reducing the human suffering that societies can cause. Their work provided conceptual tools and data that contributed to the reform currents of their societies.

'We live in tumultuous times again. In the United States, inequalities of income and wealth are increasing while our electoral system is degraded by money corruption, spectacle and propaganda. The numbers of poor are growing and their poverty deepening, while the public programs that once mitigated economic hardship are shrinking. What happens within the US is of consequence to Americans and the world. Pollution and environmental destruction from unregulated production are esca-

lating to the point where global warming may be irreversible. In Iraq, a continuing war tightly inter-braided with US domestic politics brings more dead and wounded Americans, many more uncounted dead and wounded Iraqis, and threatens widening instability in the Middle East. The US is alleged to be the most powerful nation in world history; its military and economic footprints determine the life chances of people everywhere. Tragically, that great power can and does produce policies that violate axiomatic sociological knowledge about social cohesion and stability'.

What are the prospects for understanding, and reversing, these trends? How can sociologists, whose intellectual mission it is to understand the connections between everyday life and large social forces, and to communicate that understanding to wider publics, contribute to the strengthening of democratic forces on which the prospects for a better future depend?

Frances Fox Piven

City University of New York Graduate Centre

■ CIVILISING OFFENSIVE BY CHINESE GOVERNMENT

Andrew Linklater drew our attention to the following article by Richard Spencer that appeared in the London Daily Telegraph on 2 September 2006. It reminded me of having seen an article in The Straits Times back in 1993 about the Singapore government's campaign to persuade its citizens to smile more. There could be a good PhD thesis on official civilising offensives in developing countries – SJM.

Beijing drive to improve manners for Olympics

A revolution in social etiquette is sweeping Beijing as the Communist Party seeks to prepare the capital city for the 2008 Olympic Games.

In a series of bossy initiatives, from forcing people to queue politely at bus stops to stopping concertgoers from using their mobile phones, the authorities are attempting to bring about a

major shift in the way the Chinese behave in public. Evidence of the campaign can be seen at every bus stop.

‘Everything needs to get better’, said Shen Zengde, 60, as he watched over the rush-hour queue waiting for the number 117 on Dongzhimenwai Avenue.

Mr Shen is one of 2,500 people recruited by city officials in Beijing this year as ‘Supervisors of Riding Politely’, as their orange T-shirts say in both Chinese and English.

Bus stop grannies are just one front of the battle. Last month, travel agencies were issued with guidelines on how their customers should behave when abroad.

‘The behaviour of some Chinese travellers is not compatible with the nation’s economic strength and its growing international status’, said a circular from the Spiritual Civilisation Steering Committee, which is overseeing the campaign.

Among the flaws it highlighted were spitting, clearing the throat loudly, and squatting while smoking.

‘Some of our customers make a lot of noise in restaurants when diners from other countries are eating quietly around them, and don’t use public bathrooms properly’, said Song Miaohong, of the China Youth Travel Service.

Etiquette is one of China’s most confusing aspects for visitors. There is great formality on public occasions, yet many foreigners are shocked by common aspects of street life such as ignoring queues.

In part, this goes back to the Cultural Revolution, when etiquette was condemned as bourgeois. But attitudes are changing as China turns outwards again.

The manners initiatives are also part of a wider, more ideological campaign by the government to foster ‘a harmonious society’ in the wake of China’s rapid embrace of capitalism, which many had

been taught just stood for getting rich quickly.

As well as presenting a more attractive face to the world, the party hopes people will find in a more refined, self-denying Confucianism a conformist ideology to replace the largely abandoned Marxism of Chairman Mao.

■ REFLECTIONS ON EDITING ELIAS’S ENGLISH

When Elias wrote in German, his meaning was always absolutely clear. The task of the translator and editor is therefore to render the meaning into English, and they have some latitude in striving for a clear and stylish English. That is simple in principle, although often very difficult to achieve in practice.

When he wrote in English, however, more complex problems arise. Steve Quilley, Steve Loyal and I have just been involved in editing the new editions for the Collected Works of two books, *Involvement and Detachment* and *An Essay on Time*, which originate almost entirely from texts that Elias wrote in English. This has raised difficulties of editorial policy for the whole series, and caused the three editors and the members of the Editorial Advisory Board some anguish. We finally decided that, following Keith Thomas’s advice to the effect that (within reason!) ‘You can do what you like, so long as you make clear what you have done’, we would where necessary correct Elias’s English, but give his original wording in an appendix at the back of each volume.

Elias could on occasion write powerful and elegant English. One of my own favourites is from ‘Problems of Involvement and Detachment’, first published in the *British Journal of Sociology*, 1956:

More and more groups, and with them more and more individuals, tend to become dependent on each other for their security and the satisfaction of their needs in ways which, for the greater part, surpass the comprehension of those involved. It is as if first thousands, then millions, then more and more millions walked through this

world with their hands and feet chained together by invisible ties. No one is in charge. No one stands outside. Some want to go this way, others that. They fall upon each other and, vanquishing or defeated, still remain chained to each other. No one can regulate the movements of the whole unless a great part of them are able to understand – to see, as it were, from outside – the whole patterns they form together. And they are not able to visualise themselves as part of these larger patterns because, being hemmed in and moved uncomprehendingly hither and thither in ways which none of them intended, they cannot help being preoccupied with the urgent, narrow and parochial problems which each of them has to face.

But other passages are occasionally less clear, especially in his later writings. The earliest typescripts from which *Involvement and Detachment* are derived, and the earlier sections of *Time*, were almost certainly typed by Elias himself. His preferred method of composition in the last part of his life, however, was to dictate to an assistant. There is little doubt that his prose was clumsier when produced in these more difficult circumstances. As his sight began to fail, he was less able to do detailed editing work himself. He often sent draft typescripts to native English-speaking friends such as Eric Dunning, Richard Kilminster and me. One example is a typescript of ‘The fishermen in the Maelström’ that he sent me in 1981, of which I still have a photocopy showing the amendments I suggested to Elias. Most of them, however, failed to find their way into the text when it was published in 1987. There is little reason to suppose that Elias actually rejected them; rather, he was always eager to be writing the next piece of work, and was reluctant to spend time on the increasingly difficult tasks of collating amendments and detailed editing.

It is often evident that his word order, punctuation and sentence construction are strongly influenced by his native German. For example, he will often repeat prepositions, along the lines of ‘Of the X, and of the Y, and of the Z’, where a native speaker would just say, ‘Of the X, Y and Z’. What is going on there, I think, is that Elias is seeking an

English equivalent of the inflections denoting the genitive case in German. (It may be observed that case inflections help to make clear, in German, sentences of a complexity that cannot easily be handled in English.) These quirks help to make Elias's English prose less easy to read than it should be.

'One' was another of Elias's stylistic idiosyncrasies. In a typical turn of phrase, Elias writes 'That which one today conceptualises and experiences as "time" is just that: a means of orientation.' This construction clearly reflects the use of *man* in German (like *on* in French) as an alternative to the passive voice; in English it would sound more normal to say 'What is today conceptualised ...'. The problem is that in English 'one' can be ambiguous; it can be the royal 'one', meaning 'I', or it can be the collective 'one', meaning people in general. This usage is so characteristic of Elias, however, that in the Collected Works we have not sought to change this aspect of his style, except occasionally when it is seriously ambiguous – to make clear that Elias is *not* referring to himself, but rather to other people.

He also frequently contrasts 'the former' and 'the latter', of which copy-editors disapprove because it is so often unclear what is 'the former' and what 'the latter'. Where that problem arises, we have clarified it.

It might have been expected that earlier publishers of Elias's books and journal articles would have carefully copy-edited the texts and referred back suggested changes to the author for his approval, but this seems not to have happened – I suspect at least as much from negligence on Elias's part as on that of the publishers, who did not find him an easy author with whom to deal. The Editorial Advisory Board for the Collected Works has given considerable thought to the difficulties this raises. They did not believe that they could authorise the editors of the various volumes retrospectively to make the sort of thorough revisions that might have arisen from sensitive copy-editing during Elias's lifetime. Some measures could nevertheless be taken to improve the readability of certain pas-

sages. Besides correcting typographical and minor grammatical errors, small changes have been made silently to punctuation and word order, provided that such changes in no way altered the sense of the text. We have also very occasionally inserted words or phrases in square brackets to clarify the meaning. In a small number of instances, indicated by a superscript letter in the text, where it seemed necessary to make somewhat more thoroughgoing amendments in order to make the text intelligible, the original published wording is given in the Textual Variants appendix. In making such changes, we have sometimes consulted the original typescripts or had resort to the German translation to clarify the meaning. In general, though, our assumption is that what appeared in print is the definitive version.

Stephen Mennell

■ FESTSCHRIFT FOR ERIC DUNNING

Ivan Waddington and Dominic Malcolm (eds) *Matters of Sport: Essays in Honour of Eric Dunning*, special issue of *Sport in Society* 9 (4) 2006.

Readers of *Figurations* will be delighted to learn of the publication of a *Festschrift*, a special issue of the journal *Sport in Society* dedicated to a series of essays in recognition of Eric Dunning's work in the sociology of sport. It includes contributions from: Stephen Mennell, Allen Guttmann, Patrick Murphy and Ken Sheard, Ric Gruneau, Alan Bairner, Joe Maguire, Nancy Theberge, Ken Green, Alain Garrigou, Chris Rojek and myself. Given the depth and breadth of Eric's work in the sociology of sport (and in sociology more generally) over the course of the past 40 or so years, the editors undoubtedly had a very difficult job in finalising the list of contributors. Although many distinguished figurational and non-figurational sociologists were not asked, it was felt that – because of the nature of the publication (it being a leading sport journal) – it had to be restricted to those who had written about sport in some way. I am sure that *Figurations* readers will join

with the editors in congratulating Eric on this honour. Indeed, readers will be interested to note the involvement of distinguished academics in this *Festschrift* from around the world, not all of whom share the same commitment to the application of figurational ideas as does Eric. This is itself an indication of the contribution that Dunning has made to the establishment of the sociology of sport as a sub-discipline, and figurational sociology as a particularly influential theoretical framework within the sociological study of sport, though as the editors rightly suggest, 'Dunning's own contribution has perhaps been overshadowed because of the tendency within the sub-discipline to subsume the work of Dunning under the umbrella of Norbert Elias's theoretical contribution' (p. 507). The *Festschrift* is an important and timely attempt to redress this imbalance.

If you are wondering why you have not heard about this publication it is most likely the result of the editors' and contributors' attempts to keep the special issue 'under wraps' as it were in the germination stage. This attempt was relatively successful (though I should point out that the editor of this newsletter – one Professor Mennell – did reveal, inadvertently, his involvement in the project to Eric prior to its completion, much to the chagrin of Waddington and Malcolm). However, those involved in the special issue were successful in arranging a surprise dinner in the Taj Mahal in Leicester on 14 October 2006 at which Eric was presented with a copy of the *Festschrift*. While



Eric with editors of the Festschrift, Ivan Waddington (left) and Dominic Malcolm (right)

Eric himself accepts the label 'sociologist of sport' as a matter of convenience – 'he has always seen research on sport only as a means of contributing theo-



(around the table left to right): Joe Maguire, Jennifer Smith Maguire, Stephen Mennell, Ivan Waddington, Eric's partner Julia (hidden), Eric Dunning, Dominic Malcolm, Alan Bairner, Katie Liston, Ken Sheard, Patrick Murphy.

retically and empirically to the development of the discipline of sociology as a whole' (Waddington and Malcolm, p. 505) – those of us who have worked with Eric in the sub-discipline that is the sociology of sport have found him to be a *pater familias par excellence*. Those in the figurational community who have sought, together with Eric, to extend the application of Elias's work to hitherto unexplored social phenomena, will I am sure join with the editors of this issue in raising a glass to Eric's longstanding commitment to furthering our understanding of sport and the complexities of social life more generally.

The full list of contributions is:

Ivan Waddington and Dominic Malcolm: 'Eric Dunning: this sporting life'
 Stephen Mennell: 'The contribution of Eric Dunning to the sociology of sport: the foundations'
 Allen Guttmann 'Civilised mayhem: origins and early development of American Football'
 Patrick Murphy and Ken Sheard:

'Boxing blind: unplanned processes in the development of modern boxing'
 Richard Gruneau: "Amateurism" as a sociological problem: some reflections inspired by Eric Dunning'
 Alan Bairner: 'The Leicester School and the study of football hooliganism'
 Joseph Maguire: 'Millwall and the making of football's folk devils: revisiting the Leicester period'
 Katie Liston: 'Sport and gender relations'
 Nancy Theberge: 'The gendering of sports injury: a look at "progress" in women's sport through a case study of the biomedical discourse on the injured athletic body'
 Ken Green: 'Physical education and figurational sociology: an appreciation of the work of Eric Dunning'
 Alain Garrigou: '*Illusio* in sport'
 Chris Rojek: 'Sports celebrity and the civilising process'

Katie Liston
 University of Chester

■ REVIEW ESSAY: DEREK LAYDER ON ELIAS

Derek Layder, *Understanding Social Theory*. London: Sage. 326 pp. ISBN 0761944508 (pbk).

As we know, Elias's work is becoming increasingly popular around the world and it is interesting to note his inclusion in texts devoted to sociological theory in the past ten years or so – see for example Ritzer's well-known *Sociological Theory*. More recently, the second edition of Layder's *Understanding Social Theory* now includes a discussion of Elias. But, perusing Layder's text while preparing a module on 'Sociological Theories', I was rather disappointed at the content of Layder's discussion. I suspect that my disappointment may be applied to other commentaries on the adequacy of Elias's theoretical work and you may share this disappointment if you have read this and other such texts.

The increasing tendency to publish these books for general readership by

graduates is a function both of the proliferation of sociological theories and of increasing competition between academic publishing houses. As a result, I suspect that many theoretical publications are losing some of their rigour and depth. And I say this as a relatively young sociologist with much to learn about sociological theory. The first edition of Layder's text was published in 1994 when I was an undergraduate student of Stephen Mennell's at UCD. Then, I was encouraged to read Layder's text for a number of modules and I found the text to be informative but obviously limited in depth given the wide-ranging spectrum of sociological theories and the book's stated intention of introducing the reader to key issues in modern social theory. Since then, Layder has modified the second edition to include more recent theoretical movements and he has also 'changed some of [his] views ... [and] taken the opportunity to amend or reformulate some of the [earlier] ideas' (p. vii). Here, I focus on the content of the second edition with specific reference to his positioning of Elias's work in the chapter entitled 'Beyond Macro and Micro: Abandoning False Problems'.

I shall begin by trying to elucidate those points that are useful for students who may use Layder's text as their first introduction to Elias's work, but also as a case study of some of the problems associated with modern sociological theory. Layder focuses on the concept of figuration as it 'helps us to go beyond the false dichotomies and dualisms that plague contemporary sociology' (p. 140), although he suggests soon after this that the concept 'possesses serious limitations in dealing with the relevant issues'. According to Layder, one of the strengths of Elias's developmental approach is the:

'concentration on the empirical, socially emergent nature of our [theoretical] knowledge ... However, we should beware of over-generalising his [Elias's] analysis to areas of social life which are beyond its reach. This problem is particularly acute for the analysis of situated interaction' (p. 140).

Before Layder outlines this particular problem, he notes that there has been

an uncritical extension of Elias's ideas which 'only hinders an accurate appreciation of the strengths and limitations of his work' (p. 141). The particular problem of 'situated interaction' has, according to Layder, a number of dimensions: the adequacy of various sociological explanations of 'fundamental connectedness of the individual and society' (p. 144); and, 'the fudging of the distinction between individuals and the social contexts in which they act' (p. 144), which, for Layder, means that 'it is all too easy to jump from the idea that individuals are social beings ... to the conclusion that there are no barriers at all between the individual and the social world'. In other words, Layder argues that Elias's work on the formation of people's personality structures and self-images is 'submerged in social processes virtually without a trace' (p. 144).

For Layder, 'it is perfectly feasible to talk of the relatively independent properties of individuals as long as they are understood to have an organic connection with social processes' (p. 145). Here, his definition of this organic connection seems to involve a reconstruction of the 'individual' as a unit for social analysis. If Layder is correct, then it is possible to establish 'a clear distinction between general and specific claims as they relate to the different levels of analysis' (p. 145). In his words:

'For example, a concentration on the socially constructed nature of sexuality or self-identity, as they can be traced over long periods of development, must be distinguished from a specific individual's identity and sexual development.'

Here the reader could be forgiven for thinking that Layder had driven around the roundabout, missed the Eliasian junction and arrived back at the same starting point, i.e. dualism. For Layder, Elias's work seems to suggest that individual people are 'simply reflections of (their) circumstances' (p. 145).

Following on from this, Layder argues against the so-called fashionable attempts to 'banish the individual as well as the more traditional sociologi-

cal approaches that stress the primacy of the social' (p. 146). For Layder (and others), the individual-society problem is a 'red herring' because the real question is not that sociologists reproduce this false distinction. Rather, contemporary sociologists are, it seems, more sophisticated and 'the real differences between sociologists arise over the question of *how* human social activities (including the solo activities of individuals) are related to the social contexts in which they are embedded' (p. 146). Here, perhaps there is a degree of adequacy to Layder's arguments if we exclude the bracketed addition to this statement. And, if you agree with my clarification of Layder's work, it is this very point which makes Eliasians' claims about the social generation and reproduction of I-, we- and they-images an important contribution to the field of sociology.

Having said that, my disappointment with Layder's treatment of the latter question comes from two sources. The first is that Layder does not outline Elias's work on this in any great detail, so that we could be forgiven for asking whether he has actually read it. Unlike other sociologists who tend to see *The Civilising Process* as the only discussion of Elias's theoretical work, Layder does draw from *What is Sociology?* to suggest that questions of 'situated conduct' are 'conspicuously absent from Elias's work' (p. 147). Implicit here is a critique of the absence of reflexivity in Elias's work and this critique has also been made by other academics, including some feminists. My second disappointment lies in what seems to be Layder's narrow (if not lack of) awareness of Elias's other work including *The Society of Individuals* in which Elias answers the very questions that Layder raises about 'the unique psychobiographies and distinct personalities of individuals' (Layder, 2005, p. 147). For example, Layder argues that 'Elias tends to use Freudian ideas in terms of their connection with long-term social developments and their implications for collective behaviour and the *general* personality structures of individuals. But what occurs in a general social-structural (or collective) sense does not allow us to understand the unique set of social circumstances surrounding the

psychological development of individuals' (p. 147). Here, there is the ongoing problem of Layder's commitment to valuing 'the levels of *independence* we exhibit from (social relationships) at the same time' (p. 147).

Layder's final charge against Eliasians relates to their claims that the concept of figuration is a breakthrough in relation to the macro-micro problem. Here, Layder takes issue with Mennell's suggestion 'that, if we join network analysis to Elias's notion of interdependencies, we then have a more serviceable means of linking macro and macro than the concept of interaction' (p. 149). Even if his interpretation of Mennell's work was accurate, Layder argues that the combination of network analysis to Elias's notion of interdependence blurs the 'distinctive characteristics of activities and structures'. Therefore, 'Elias and his followers are led to the conclusion that, for all intents and purposes, structures and activities are the same (networks of varying size and density and so on) and that they have similar properties' (p. 149). Because of this narrow understanding of interdependence, Layder suggests that the difference between face-to-face interaction and so-called structural or macro phenomena can be explained as follows:

'they are both networks of individuals distinguished simply by the greater length of the interdependence chains in macro phenomena and ... face-to-face encounters are characterised by more immediate and personalised involvements'. (p. 150)

Here it seems that Layder does not consider that the very premise of his question reflects a narrow and reductionist understanding of figuration and *homines aperti*. Kilminster's warnings about the problems emanating from the persistence of Kantianism are clearly pertinent.

Following this claim, Layder chooses the example of the differing nature of social ties with government and formal authority to elucidate the problems that he sees with the notion of interdependence. Ties with government and formal authority are, for him, ties of interdependence that are 'based primarily upon

an absence rather than a presence' (p. 150), and these ties are, at one and the same time, mediated by the face-to-face interaction with a government clerk or official. We have a relatively impersonal relationship with this person and 'an externally defined interest' (p. 151). For Layder, the 'defining characteristics of institutions' are to be found in 'the influence of reproduced practices on the behaviour of many people, many of whom have no connections with each other and are unlikely to have face-to-face contact' (p. 151).

To conclude, my disappointment lies in Layder's philosophical commitment to reflexivity and the meanings that individual people give to social interaction. While the latter is not necessarily problematic in and of itself from a sociological point of view, Layder's approach to this issue is, ironically, an example of the very problems that Elias sought to resolve, or at the very least, dissolve. That is, Layder sees sociological approaches to the individual-society problem in either/or terms – either the 'individual' is 'firmly embedded in social relationships' or s/he is 'entirely socially constructed' (p. 153). Moreover, Layder's commitment to the 'intersubjective meanings' of social behaviour and 'face-to-face interactive processes' is characteristic of other contemporary agency-structure approaches. Layder refers to this as 'the distinctive characteristics of social activity and social structure' (p. 153). Thus, in seeking to outline Elias's ideas about the abandonment of false dichotomies, Layder has unintentionally reproduced these very dichotomies in his critique of Elias's work so that his conclusions – 'by simply abandoning these dualisms and distinctions we do not make any advances in our understanding of social processes' (p. 152) – are self-evident to him, but tautological for Eliasians. In fact, rather than introduce the reader to key issues in modern social theory, Layder's work (on Elias at least) is a useful case study that elucidates some of the problems with modern 'social theory', and especially with introductory books about it.

Katie Liston
University of Chester

■ DAVID MATSINHE ON THE DANCE FLOOR

David Matsinhe of the University of Alberta has sent us a stimulating paper on 'The Dance Floor' which, however, is far too long for us to publish here (the original is longer than this issue of Figurations). But, especially in view of Elias's own use of images of dancing when he sought to explain the notion of 'figuration', we thought readers would be interested in this brief summary of David's argument:

In 'The Dance Floor', Matsinhe seeks to explore people's emotional excitement and their pleasurable enjoyment from, and in, the dance figurations they form on the dance floor. His justification for doing so is the fact that, as Elias and Dunning have argued, people's pleasurable satisfactions have received much less sociological attention than social constraints. For Matsinhe, the dance floor figuration, when taken as essential in the development of modern Canada, is an interesting site for scientific investigation which can illustrate the emotional tension-balance in official, non-leisure life, on the one hand, and the needs for emotional excitement in leisure life, on the other, as well as revealing aspects of the emotional history of Canada. As part of this, he utilises Victor Turner's theory of liminality, Mikhail Bakhtin's historico-cultural conception of carnival, and Norbert Elias's theory of the civilising process, particularly ideas on the quest for excitement and informalisation. For the author, the experience of the dance floor figuration is more or less akin to *communitas* experience in liminal spaces, given the technologies and techniques involved in nightclubs and dance floors which are designed to facilitate and speed up the process of emotional stimulation and excitement. There are also substances which help dancers to 'lay down their ingrown anti-instinct and anti-drive armour, take it easy, lie back, unwind their minds and relax'; and dancers require the ability to read more or less accurately the emotional signals which other dancers give off, particularly when it comes to the selection of a sexual partner. The dance floor is also mimetic to a certain extent, but it is also within the range

of the civilising gaze in the form of social controls and self-restraints. Of particular relevance here are broader developments including the institutionalisation of multiculturalism and the

balance between feelings of superiority and inferiority between and amongst established and outsider groups in the Canadian context.

For the full paper, contact the author at: matsinhe@ualberta.ca



■ RECENT BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Peter R. Gleichmann, *Soziologie als Synthese: Zivilisationstheoretische Schriften über Architektur, Wissen und Gewalt* [Sociology as Synthesis: Essays on Architecture, Knowledge and Violence in the Light of the Theory of Civilising Processes] (edited by Hans-Peter Waldhoff). Wiesbaden: VS – Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006. ISBN-10 3-531-15324-2. 420 pp. (hardback) €49.90.

Peter Gleichmann was one of the very first scholars trying to repatriate the sociology of Norbert Elias, and especially the theory of civilising processes, into Germany. He not only did a great deal to promote the reception of Elias's writings, but he also contributed to further theoretical development. This can now be seen in a comprehensive book, encompassing selected writings from his work over four decades and on the four central topics on which he wrote: architecture, knowledge, Norbert Elias's theory formation, and violence.

One might well ask how these seemingly quite unrelated topics are connected. One connection can be seen in the subtitle: all these subjects are dealt with under the aspect of their meaning for humans in civilising processes. The other is evident in the title: it is the quest for connecting empirical evidence itself, the quest for synthesis, which holds the book together.

In a further step Gleichmann relates the theory of civilising processes to the social processes of synthesis-formation

as core of Elias's sociology of knowledge. Modern science, Gleichmann argues, leads to fragmentation of its objects. In the case of the human and life sciences, the theoretical fragmentation of human beings often leads to their reduction to their lifeless aspects. This makes it so easy to employ modern sciences for practical programs of the reduction and even destruction of lives. Gleichmann shows how this happens in the processes of planning the built environment, in scientific methodologies and in the deadly intertwining of militarisation and civilisation.



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- 5 Über massenhaftes Töten sprechen lernen

Alejandro N. García Martínez, *El proceso de la civilización en la sociología de Norbert Elias*. Pamplona: Ediciones Universidad de Navarra, 2006. 410 pp. ISBN: 84-313-2372-8 (pb).

This is quite evidently a major and very welcome treatment in Spanish of Elias's whole work. We hope to publish a full review in *Figurations* 27.

Raul Sanchez, Paradigma cultural y violencia en la sociedad Española: El caso de los deportes de combate en la comunidad de Madrid [Cultural paradigm and violence in Spanish society: the case of combat sports in the autonomous community of Madrid] Unpublished PhD thesis, Universidad Complutense, Madrid.

Abstract: The central issue of the investigation is the analysis of the concept of violence in contemporary Spanish society through the study of combat sports (conceived of as institutionalised violence). For that purpose an historical analysis of such activities was made, in relation with the development of society as a whole, on the basis of which a field study was carried out of two of this kind of discipline, boxing and aikido, as they have developed today in Madrid. It is shown how the institutionalised violence observed in these sports is delimited between two thresholds, one upper and one lower, beyond which we find those activities not considered acceptable as combat sports. The case of boxing is utterly significant because even though it was a very popular sport until the 1970s, at the end of that decade it encountered great public opposition, which placed it on the very limit of acceptability. That fact is an index of a change in social sensibility, of cultural paradigms relating to questions of violence, and this was associated with the social ascent of the new middle classes with higher education, forming an hegemonic group in opposition to forms of conflict among people predominant throughout the recent history of our country (civil war, dictatorship, terrorism). Such circumstances changed the way in which boxing was practised, effectively bringing professional boxing to an end, and bringing about new forms closer in appearance to recreation than to a combat sport.

Stephen Mennell, ‘Elias and the Counter-ego’, *History of the Human Sciences*, 19 (2) 2006: 73–91.

In conversation, Norbert Elias experimented with the concept of a ‘counter-ego’. Although I myself never discussed it with him, I think I knew exactly what he meant – and to what it corresponded in his own experience – as soon as Cas Wouters mentioned the idea to me. Like so many other civilised human beings, Norbert was often his own worst enemy. This article, based on personal recollections and my own correspondence with Elias, recalls the last highly productive part of his life, when he gradually attracted an extensive international following. They depict his foibles, some endearing, some that

seemed perversely to stand in the way of his growing reputation. – *SJM*

Marjorie Fitzpatrick, ‘Music and Power in Eighteenth-century Court Society’, *All Hallows Studies* (Dublin), Summer 2006, pp. 81–94.

This article summarises Marjorie Fitzpatrick's 2004 UCD PhD thesis (see *Figurations* 22). She focuses on Handel's *Messiah*, first performed in Dublin in 1742, and especially on its libretto by Charles Jennens, arguing that it provided a justification of a sort of Protestant ‘divine right of kings’. It was especially relevant to the peculiar offshoot of eighteenth-century court society represented by the ‘Protestant Ascendancy’ in Ireland, serving to empower the members of that minority ruling class emotionally, morally, politically and religiously.

Fernando Amoudia de Haro (Universidad de Salamanca), ‘Administrar el yo: literatura de autoayuda y gestion del comportamiento y los afectos’, *REIS (Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas)* 113 (Enero–Marzo) 2006: 49–75.

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyse self-help books using an analytical approach based on Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes, which explains the code for the management of conduct and the emotions, here referred to as the ‘reflective civilisation code’. The study of the code involves a presentation of its contents as well as a statement of the arguments used to support advice and precepts regarding the regulation of conduct and the emotions. Finally, we propose a characterisation of the social bases of the code, taking the theoretical contributions of the so-called ‘Anglo-Foucauldian’ theories as a model.

Fernando Amoudia de Haro, ‘Una Aproximación al proceso civilizatorio español’, *Praxis Sociológica* 9, 2005: 91–122.

Abstract: The aim of this paper is to offer a general approach to the Spanish civilising process in its ‘micro’ level, using Elias's theory of civilising processes. The work is centred on five basic social codes (medieval courtesy,

modern courtesy, prudence, civilisation, and the reflexive civilisation code). The reconstruction of the codes shows some moments of this process. Finally, a possible development in the contemporary civilising process is suggested, based on an analogy between classical good manners handbooks and self-help texts.

Sofia Gaspar, 'Consecuencias no intencionales y figuración: una incursión crítica en la obra de Norbert Elias', *REIS (Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas)* 101 (Enero–Marzo) 2003: 119–48.

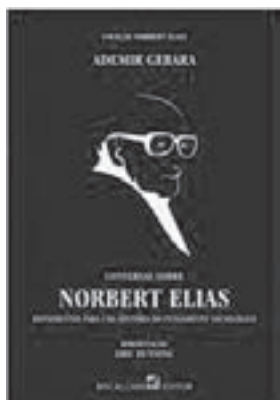
Abstract: This paper analyses the theoretical centrality of a classic subject in sociology – the 'unintended consequences of social action' (UCA) – through an exploration of the work of Norbert Elias. First of all, the paper tries to delineate the analytical bases of the UCA, having as a starting point the critical revision made by Ramón Ramos, who tries to revitalise its operational character in contemporary sociology. Secondly, in line with Ramos's proposal, the way Elias develops the task of focusing the subject of sociology through the overcoming of certain traditional dualisms: individual/society, action/structure, micro/macro – introducing at the centre of his analysis the concept of 'figuration', as a synthetical promise in social theory. This concept integrates two analytical levels – intended and unintended structures – that are frequently differentiated from one another. Elias postulates the existence of (a) unintended interdependences between intentional actions; (b) these unintended interdependences remain over the intentional actions of individuals, when one analyses social processes. In this way, intentions and individuals are made by unintended interdependences in the figurational process. Finally, the theoretical strengths and weaknesses of Elias's proposal are discussed in view of his persistent attempt to distance his views from holism and from methodological individualism.

Wolf Lepenies, *The Seduction of Culture in German History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. 260 pp.

In this major and rather brilliantly writ-

ten book, Wolf Lepenies examines what he sees as a characteristically German habit of valuing cultural achievement above all else, and rating it as a noble substitute for politics. He argues that this preference for art over politics is essential to understanding the peculiar nature of Nazism: Hitler and many of his circle were failed artists and intellectuals who seem to have practised politics as a substitute form of art. Lepenies ranges widely through German history and culture from the eighteenth century, from Goethe to Thomas Mann, and showing how the German sense of cultural superiority affected its relations with other countries, notably France and the USA.

Right at the beginning of the book, Lepenies quotes from Elias's *The Germans*: 'embedded in the meaning of the German term "culture" was a non-political and perhaps even anti-political bias symptomatic of the recurrent feeling among the German middle-class elites that politics ... represented the area of their humiliation and lack of freedom ...'; and he then refers to Elias's well-known discussion of the German antithesis of *Kultur* and *Zivilisation*, at the beginning of *The Civilising Process*. Like Elias, Lepenies then opens the development of his argument by referring to Thomas Mann's *Reflections of an Un-Political Man*. There is thus a sense in which Lepenies's hypothesis is directly derived from Elias. So it is a little surprising that there are no further references to Elias's writings. Nevertheless, *The Seduction of Culture in German History* is a brilliant extension of these ideas that will fascinate all readers who are interested in this aspect of Elias's concerns.



Ademir Gebara, ed., *Conversas sobre Norbert Elias: Depoimentos para uma história do pensamento sociológico*. 2nd ed., Piracicaba, SP: Biscailchin Editor, 2006

This is the second edition of Ademir Gebara's compilation of interviews about Elias and matters Eliasian with Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom and Stephen Mennell, conducted in Brazil and Oxford in 2000–1.

■ BIBLIOGRAPHICAL RETROSPECT

Claudine Haroche, 'Position et disposition des convives dans la société de cours au 17^e siècle' [Position and seating of guests in seventeenth-century court society: points to consider about political power in space at table]. *Revue française de science politique*, 48 (3–4) 1998: 376–86.

This article forms a footnote to Elias's *The Court Society*. Seventeenth-century court table arrangements have been studied often and well. Studying them again is nevertheless interesting because, through the functioning of space at table, it is possible to raise questions essential for the intelligibility of certain anthropological elements of political power. In addition to the symbolic dimension of power, we would like to take into account a dimension perceptible in the position and seating of guests imposed by ceremonial etiquette, a dimension found equally in the vocabulary of the table. Maurice Halbwachs's work is of great interest in this perspective: it highlights the role of the material components of institutional functioning, and leads to a reflection about the congruence of place in concrete, material, physical space and position in the social and political order, in the institutional space.

■ BOOK ANNOUNCEMENTS

Two volumes of the Collected Works of Norbert Elias in English, along with a separate new book by Elias – *The Genesis of the Naval Profession*, compiled in large part from his unpublished papers – will be published by UCD

Press in February 2007:
Involvement and Detachment
Collected Works vol. 8
Edited by Stephen Quilley
ISBN: 1904558429
Price: £ 45.00 / € 60.00

An Essay on Time
Collected Works vol. 9
Edited by Steven Loyal and Stephen
Mennell
ISBN: 1904558410
Price: £ 45.00 / € 60.00

The Genesis of The Naval Profession
Edited and with an Introduction by
René Moelker and Stephen Mennell
ISBN: 1904558801
Price: £ 40.00 / € 50.00

For further details, and to order copies,
see www.ucdpress.ie

■ FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES

X Civilising Process Symposium, University of Campinas, Brazil, 2–5 April 2007

The tenth Brazilian symposium on
civilising processes is scheduled to
be held on 2–5 April 2007 (the week
before Easter). Anyone interested in
attending should email Ademir Gebara
(am_gebara@yahoo.com.br) or Tatiana
Savoia Landini (tatalan@uol.com.br).

Conference to mark the completion of the Norbert Elias *Gesammelte Schriften*

*Deutsches Literaturarchiv, Marbach an
der Neckar, Germany*

To mark the completion of the publica-
tion by Suhrkamp of Elias's collected
works in German, a conference will be
held on 14–15 September 2007 at the
Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach,
where his papers are now housed.

It is planned that on the Friday after-
noon two distinguished speakers will
respond to the closing pages of *Über
den Prozess der Zivilisation*, showing
their contemporary relevance to a glo-
balising world more than half a century
after they were written. That evening,
it is hoped that it will be possible to
present a live performance of Elias's
Der Ballade vom Armen Jakob.

Call for papers:
On the Saturday, no more than *eight*
younger scholars will be invited to
address the conference. If you would
like to be one of those who give
papers, please inform the Elias Foun-
dation (giving your name and topic)
at elias@wxs.nl by 31 March 2007.
The Foundation will meet the costs of
speakers' travel to and accommodation
in Marbach.

Civilising and Decivilising Processes: A Figurational Approach to Ameri- can Studies

*Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universität
Frankfurt, 22–24 November, 2007*

Call for Papers

'Civilising processes', 'habitus', 'out-
sider', and 'figuration' are key concepts
from a body of cultural theories hardly
known in American Studies on either
side of the Atlantic. They refer to an
examination of human figurations in
history, a socio-historical approach
as practiced by Norbert Elias, Pierre
Bourdieu, and more recently, Loïc Wac-
quant. We invite scholars in the fields
of American Studies, Literature, Sociol-
ogy, History or Political Science inter-
ested in applying an approach based on
figurational sociology to phenomena
in the US. Possible contributions may
address, but are not limited to, the fol-
lowing topics and questions:

The Formation of the State and of Indi- viduals

The formation of the American state as
conquering territory, nature, and people
lasted well into the nineteenth century,
when these processes had largely come
to an end in Europe. This may be used
to reformulate Crèvecoeur's famous
question, 'What, then, is an Ameri-
can?': What, then, is the specific rela-
tion of state formation and habitus in
America? Contributions may look at the
development of manners, at the role of
sports, at concepts such as *wilderness*
or *frontier* with their particular relation
to violence, or at figurations such as
established and outsiders.

Challenges to the Civilising Process

In the eyes of contemporaries – in the
eighteenth as well as in the twenty-
first century – slavery and torture,
war and displacement were recognised
and deplored as threats to a civilised

and democratic way of life while they
were also tacitly accepted as inevitable
aspects of securing the achievements
of the American Revolution. While all
nations face challenges to civilising
processes, there is a particular aware-
ness of the tensions between the ideal
self-image as a beacon of civilisation
and democracy and the realities of
violent conflicts in the USA that has
characterised its intellectual discourse
in a marked way. We invite papers on
or within this tradition.

Civilising Projects? Religion, Litera- ture, and the Arts

Religion, literature, and the arts have
long been seen as civilising projects
– a view that persists in hopes to find
sites of subversion and resistance at
least in the latter two. What is the rela-
tion of these fields to larger social,
political, and economic processes?
Contributions might examine interrela-
tions between these fields, the attitude
towards violence in them, economic
and legal questions such as patronage
or copyright, the formation of a specifi-
cally American religious field, the role
of 'schools' or single powerful figures
within figurations.

Please indicate your general interest as
soon as possible, and send a one-page
proposal by the end of January 2007
to c.buschendorf@em.uni-frankfurt.de
and/or a.franke@em.uni-frankfurt.de

■ OBITUARY

Olive Banks (1923–2006)

I learned with deep sadness in early
October that my friend and former
colleague, Olive Banks (née Davies),
had died on 14 September aged 83.
She was a highly regarded, very pro-
ductive and well-liked member of the
Leicester Sociology Department during
the 1970s, and (together with her late
husband, Joe) played an important part
in helping to sustain throughout that
decade Leicester's reputation for first-
rate sociological scholarship which had
been established under the regime of
Ilya Neustadt and Norbert Elias during
the 1960s.

Olive received her PhD from the
University of London in 1953, and

was appointed Research Lecturer in the Department of Social Science at the University of Liverpool in 1954, remaining there until 1969–70. In the latter academic year, she was appointed Reader in Sociology at the University of Leicester and took up her post in 1971. She was awarded a Personal Chair in 1973 – when she was, it is hard now to believe, the first female professor to be appointed at the University of Leicester.

Olive's main area of interest and expertise was the sociology of education. Indeed, her influential textbook on that subject had sold more than 30,000 copies as early as 1972. She also made important contributions (both alone and in collaboration with Joe) in the fields of industrial relations, population studies and the study of what is now called 'gender relations.' She even prophetically anticipated environmental sociology and possibly even global warming! For example, she said in her 1974 inaugural lecture: 'We are ... now beginning to recognize that a combination of population expansion and economic growth produces a level of environmental pollution which may in the long run prove not only aesthetically unacceptable but an actual, and even acute, danger to all forms of life'.

The most distinctive feature of Leicester sociology in the 1960s and 70s was the insistence of Neustadt and Elias that sociology should be a comparative and historical (more properly 'developmental' or 'processual') subject that seeks to build on the contributions of such classical sociologists as Comte, Marx, Durkheim, Spencer and Weber. Partly as a result of the post-World War II drive to build a welfare state, the influence of the philosopher Karl Popper, and sociological trends in the USA, such a view came to be widely challenged at the London School of Economics during the 1950s. In her early encounters with Norbert Elias and me, Olive Banks had been sceptical about what she saw as our 'evolutionary' and even Victorian perspective. However, Olive was one of the few LSE products of that period who managed effectively to synthesise parts of the LSE position with parts of the tradition of what later became known as 'the

Leicester School' and which began to challenge the LSE as the chief national producer of sociologists in the 1960s. David Lockwood implicitly recognised Olive's synthesising abilities when he wrote of her that: 'Her first book, *Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education*, was not only an important contribution to the study of education and stratification but it also broke new ground methodologically as a model for the writing of "sociological history".'

Olive's 'elective affinity' with what she called 'the Leicester tradition' was shown even more clearly when, referring to Norbert Elias's essay on 'involvement and detachment', she wrote: 'The cultivation of the necessary degree of detachment is ... greatly aided by membership of an academic community dedicated to scholarship in the widest of terms. The old-fashioned academic values of intellectual curiosity and the dedication to truth are, it is now fashionable to point out, themselves ideological statements rather than factual descriptions of the academic scene, convenient cloaks ... for privilege and self-seeking. I would not wish to dispute that this is sometimes so, but an exclusive attention to the ideological aspects of academic values is to miss their function in maintaining the independence of the universities, an independence which is in my view a necessary condition for the progress of science generally, and the social sciences in particular.'

I think that it is best in the context of an obituary to leave these words, penned and spoken by Olive more than thirty years ago, to speak for themselves. But let it also be said that Olive and Joe Banks are perhaps best remembered in Leicester for taking voluntary early retirement in 1982 when the Thatcher government imposed 10 per cent staffing cuts on the universities. It was an act which helped to save the jobs of some five of our colleagues and is one more measure of the spirit of selflessness and humanity which was mixed in equal measure with the Bankses' sociological nous.

Eric Dunning

■ CONTRIBUTIONS TO FIGURATIONS

The next issue of *Figurations* will be mailed in May 2007. News and notes should be sent to the Editors by 1 April 2007.

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[NOTE: Until 31 August 2007, the Editor is on sabbatical leave at St Catharine's College, Cambridge. Postal, fax and email communications to the UCD address will still reach him, but a new telephone number in Cambridge is given below.]

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Contributions should preferably be e-mailed to the Editor, or sent on a disk (formatted for PC-DOS, not Apple Mackintosh); Microsoft Word, Rich Text and plain text files can all be handled. Do not use embedded footnotes. Hard copy is accepted reluctantly.

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