

Figurations

Newsletter of the Norbert Elias Foundation

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■ AMANDA ROHLOFF

In one of the most tragic announcements *Figurations* has ever had to make, we have to report the death of Amanda Rohloff only weeks after gaining her PhD at Brunel University. Many readers will have met Amanda at conferences in the last few years. The abstract of her thesis, together with a list of her recent publications, appears in this issue – we had pasted it into the text just days before news of her death reached us. Her PhD supervisor, Jason Hughes, has written a heartfelt obituary in this issue of *Figurations*.

■ PEOPLE

Jason Hughes has been appointed a Professor of Sociology at the University of Leicester. Jason is a Leicester graduate, who wrote his PhD thesis there under the supervision of Eric Dunning (see *Figurations* 9), and the resulting book *Learning to Smoke* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) won the Norbert Elias Prize in 2005. Coming immediately after the publication of his book with Eric, *Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology* (see below), Jason's return to Leicester – one of the spiritual homes of figurational sociology – may be seen as a momentous event.

*

José Esteban Castro has been elected a Corresponding Member of the Mexican

Academy of Sciences (AMC). The citation recognised his work on the interrelations between water policies and citizenship rights, highlighting the interplay between environmental and socio-political change, and focusing on social struggles over control of water in the process of state formation. See his book *Water, Power, and Citizenship: Social Struggle in the Basin of Mexico* (Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2006 – mentioned in *Figurations* 24).

*

Steve Quilley has moved from Keele University to the University of Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, as Associate Professor of Social and Environmental Innovation.

■ FROM THE NORBERT ELIAS FOUNDATION

Secretary to the Foundation

Marcello Aspria has stepped down as Secretary to the Norbert Elias Foundation, in order to concentrate on completing his PhD at the Erasmus University Rotterdam. In his place, we have appointed Esther Wils.

Esther has a degree in Italian language and literature. For a good many years she has a part-time job as Editorial Secretary of the 175-year-old Dutch intellectual journal *De Gids*, and she will continue in that role as well as becoming the part-time Secretary to the NEF.

Norbert Elias Prize to be discontinued

With regret, the Board of the Norbert Elias Foundation has decided to discontinue the Norbert Elias Prize, which since 1999 has been awarded for what the jury judged to be the best first book by an author in sociology or closely cognate fields, published in the preceding two years.

Three main reasons governed our decision. Primarily, reading and evaluating the steadily increasing number of books submitted had become too large a task both for the members of the jury and for the administrative

capacities of the Foundation's modest office. Furthermore, a number of other prizes – such as the Philip Abrams Prize in Britain – have since been established for similar purposes. And also, the fact that the Prize had been won ever since 2005 by the same publisher had become an embarrassment (even if also a great tribute to the quality of University of Chicago Press's list!).

Winners of the Elias Prize since its inception 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)

2007 Georgi Derlugian, *Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

2009 Elizabeth Bernstein, *Temporarily Yours: Intimacy, Authenticity, and the Commerce of Sex* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

2011 Brett Bowden, *The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

We are grateful to the former winners who have served as jury-members, and most especially to Wilbert van Vree who has chaired the jury and largely run the whole proceedings for a number of years.

It is hoped that the book prize may in due course be replaced by an essay prize, and a triumvirate of Stephen Vertigans, Annette Treibel and Johan Heilbron is discussing that possibility.

The NEF blog

<http://norberteliasfoundation.nl/blog/> (or www.norberteliasfoundation.nl and click on 'Blog').

We increasingly use the Norbert Elias Foundation blog to mail out announcements and other news that cannot wait for the twice-yearly publication of *Figurations*.

Just recently, though, the users list – the email addresses to which the blog sends news – has become corrupted. We are repairing it, but some mistakes may have crept in. If you are a current user, please check that you are back on the list – or update your details if they are wrong.

If you receive *Figurations* by post but are not a subscriber to the blog, and would like to subscribe, please email us (elias@planet.nl) so that we can add your address to the blog users list.

Human Figurations online Journal

Become a peer reviewer for Human Figurations: Long-term Perspectives on the Human Condition

Our sister publication, the online journal *Human Figurations*, invites expressions of interest from anyone interested in serving as a peer reviewer of articles submitted to the journal. Please contact the Editor, Katie Liston, at humanfigurations@me.com.

Procedure for special issues of Human Figurations

Human Figurations is released twice a year and the editor now welcomes proposals for special issues of the journal. A copy of the proposal template should be obtained from the administrator, Clare Spencer (adhjournal@hotmail.co.uk). This outlines the necessary information that should be included in any proposal, for example, the proposed theme and content of the special issue, the 'fit' with the over-arching aims of the journal, guest editor(s) and the practical management of submissions, proposed schedule and so on.

■ ENLARGED EDITION
OF *WHAT IS
SOCIOLOGY?* PUBLISHED

Norbert Elias, *What is Sociology?*, translated by Grace Morrissey, Stephen Mennell and Edmund Jephcott, edited by Artur Bogner, Katie Liston and Stephen Mennell (Dublin: UCD Press, 2012 [Collected Works, vol. 5]). xviii + 236 pp. ISBN: 978-1-906359-05-8. €60.00

The new edition of *What is Sociology?* includes a substantial ‘missing chapter’ on Marx and another shorter text on ‘The sociogenesis of the concept of “society” as the subject matter of sociology’ never previously published in English, both translated for this edition by Edmund Jephcott.

The translation of the original book made by Grace Morrissey and Stephen Mennell in the early 1970s (the first translation into English of Elias’s major works) has been substantially revised in the light of later translations – especially by Edmund Jephcott – of other works.

The next volume, *Studies on the Germans*, is already in press, and will be published in spring 2013. *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections* is at an advanced stage of preparation, for publication in the autumn, and the series will be completed with the eighteenth volume, supplements and the consolidated index to the Collected Works. A conference to celebrate the end of the project will be held in June 2014.

Buy online: Copies of any of the volumes of the Collected Works may be purchased online at a 20 per cent discount, directly from the publishers, at www.ucdpress.ie.

■ IN THE MEDIA

Steven Pinker wrote an op-ed piece in the *New York Times*, 24 October 2012, entitled ‘Why are states so red and blue?’, discussing the ideological polarisation in the Presidential election – which is also in part a geographical polarisation. The conclusion reads as follows:

‘The historian Pieter Spierenburg has suggested that “democracy came too soon to America,” namely, before the government had disarmed its **citizens**. Since American governance was more or less democratic from the start, the people could choose not to cede to it the safeguarding of their personal safety but to keep it as their prerogative. The unhappy result of this vigilante justice is that American homicide rates are far higher than those of Europe, and those of the South higher than those of the North.

‘If this history is right, the American political divide may have arisen not so much from different conceptions of human nature as from differences in how best to tame it. The North and coasts are extensions of Europe and continued the government-driven civilising process that had been gathering momentum since the Middle Ages. The South and West preserved the culture of honour that emerged in the anarchic territories of the growing country, tempered by their own civilising forces of churches, families and temperance.’

John Carter Wood was interviewed about his book *The Most Remarkable Woman in England: Poison, Celebrity and the Trials of Beatrice Pace* (Manchester University Press, 2012, 272 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7190-8618-2), on BBC Radio 4’s show *Woman’s Hour* programme on 17 October 2012. Beatrice Pace was a farmer’s wife who in 1928 was tried and acquitted for the murder of her husband by arsenical poisoning. John says that there is no direct reference to the theory of civilising processes in the book itself, but the decline in the tolerance of domestic violence and the way in which Mrs Pace, the main figure in the book, was seen by the public in sympathetic terms does feature.

David Christian was referred to (inevitably?) as a ‘maverick historian’ in *The Observer*, London, 28 October 2012. The context was an article entitled ‘Climate change and science are at heart of new theory of history backed by Bill Gates’. The good news is that Bill Gates was greatly enthused when he signed up to an online course based on David’s great book *Maps of Time: An Introduction to Big History* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2004), and that a 12-hour documentary series about it, *Mankind: The Story of All of Us*, was shown on the History Channel from November. The bad news is that the journalist who wrote the article, Vanessa Thorpe, *The Observer*’s arts and media correspondent, plainly had no idea at all what ‘big history’ was about, and tried trivially to tie the story to current British political squabbles about the school history syllabus. (On ‘Big History’, see also Steve Quilley’s review essay below.)

Gad Yair (Professor of Sociology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem) and the Iranian sociologist Behzad Akbari jointly published a powerful article entitled ‘Iran and Israel: Humiliation, fear, reconciliation’ in the *Jerusalem Post*, 27 August 2012, relating the two countries’ reciprocal fear of each other to a history of national humiliation that is common to both.

■ GOUDSBLOM PROMOVENDI CELEBRATE HIS 80TH BIRTHDAY

Joop Goudsblom, Professor Emeritus of Sociology, University of Amsterdam, celebrated his eightieth birthday on 11 October 2012, and the following evening his *promovendi* – the former students whose PhDs he had supervised – gave a dinner in his honour. Not quite all of them were able to attend, but here is the complete list of the 30 graduates, many of them now prominent social scientists.

1978 Ruud Stokvis
 1980 Paul Kapteyn, Han Israëls
 1984 Nico Wilterdink, Christien Brinkgreve
 1985 Stephen Mennell
 1986 Kees Schmidt
 1987 Bart van Heerikhuizen, Henri Goverde, Bram Kempers
 1988 Godfried van Benthem van den Bergh, Bas Willink
 1989 Kees Bruin
 1990 Anneke van Otterloo, Cas Wouters, Johan Heilbron, Warna Oosterbaan, Sophie de Schaepdrijver

1991 Bram van Stolk
 1992 Fred Spier
 1993 Jan Willem Gerritsen
 1994 Maarten van Bottenburg, Wilbert van Vree
 1995 Gerhard Durlacher (honorary degree)
 1997 Jo Swabe
 1999 Dienne Hondius, Wilma Aarts
 2000 Giseline Kuipers
 2001 Cas Smitshuijsen
 2002 Johannes van der Weiden



■ IT SKILLS OF THE FIGURATIONAL FOUNDING FATHERS

Katie Liston found this in a card-shop. Of course, Norbert Elias died before the IT age had really begun, but Katie found that the cartoon unaccountably made her think of Eric Dunning.



■ REVIEW ESSAY

Fred Spier, *Big History and the Future of Humanity* (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2011).

Stephen Quilley
University of Waterloo

Imagine that you could look at the Earth and the universe from a vantage point outside space and time. Imagine that you could press a re-wind button ... and go all the way back? What would you see? What would be the most significant features of cosmic history in reverse? Great episodes such as World War I or the French Revolution would disappear into a blur. A series of more significant punctuations would come into view: modernity and the connecting up of a global human culture; agriculture and the emergence of the first cities; fire culture and language; the Cambrian explosion and multi-cellular organisms; the evolution of life; the creation of planets and solar systems; the birth of stars ... the Big Bang.

That is a lot of history and seemingly an impossibly large canvas. Is it really possible to make sensible observations about process of cosmic unfolding, so broadly conceived? Is it really meaningful to delineate continuities in developments operating at such different levels of integration, units of analysis and time frames? How can such a big picture help us to navigate the social and ecological problems of the twenty-first century?

Although all species eventually become extinct, most manage to stay the course for around two million years. In the long view, sustainability is about whether humanity manages to live out this evolutionary potential. For this reason it should not be measured in decades or even centuries, but rather millennia and aeons. Longer than recorded history, such a time-scale is difficult to conceive, let alone to operationalise at the level of politics. But this is the task facing the current generation and their great-grandchildren. The problem is made more difficult by the fragmentation and increasing specialisation of scientific

knowledge, which makes it difficult see the big picture. At the same time, without a shared, taken-for-granted religious world-view it is also difficult to find meaning and significance in the world.

During the last two centuries, science has been profoundly successful in unravelling the connections and processes underlying all of the dynamic complexity observable in the material world. This proliferating stock of scientific knowledge has created a cognitive map that allows humanity to predict, intervene in, and manipulate natural processes to an astonishing degree. Such success has been achieved largely on the back of a programme of methodological reductionism – that is, a strategy for understanding complex phenomena by focusing on the interaction of ever more fundamental parts. This methodological strategy has often been accompanied by an implicit and sometimes unacknowledged assumption that the epiphenomena of complex systems can be explained satisfactorily with reference only to the characteristics of their constituent parts.

In broad terms, there is no doubt that reductionism in the natural science has proved itself. But such success has come at a cost, evident in the fragmentation of knowledge and the proliferation of specialised disciplines. At an anecdotal level, this is very clear in the biography of scientific intellectuals. Noted polymath Benjamin Franklin combined a career as a first-rate scientist with inventor (lightning rods, bifocals, the Franklin stove, odometer), musician, postmaster, politician, political theorist, printer and benefactor both of the first public lending library in the United States and the first fire station in Pennsylvania. A century later, Charles Darwin was (I assume) less accomplished on the piano, took little active role in politics and had few inventions to his name. Like other scientists of the time, he was, however, able to keep abreast of developments across all of the major disciplines. And until the First World War, the relatively small number of universities, the limited number of technical specialisations and the small community of professional academics

meant that intellectual endeavour was invariably leavened with a cross-referencing impetus to synthesis and integration. Norbert Elias was part of the last generation that attempted to sustain this breadth of scientific vision. However, the pace of technical development between the wars, the massive growth of universities and the emergence of hundreds of new national education systems after 1945, saw not only a permanent rift between C. P. Snow's 'two cultures' but also the increasing fragmentation of sub-disciplines within the broad fields of science, the humanities and the social sciences.

A notable highpoint in the reductionist ethos in biology was Richard Dawkins's *The Selfish Gene* (1975). Dawkins's imperial vision insisted that the diversity of all biological form and function, including human culture and psychology, could be explained with reference only to the characteristics of individual parts (genes). However, since the 1970s, even in the biological sciences there has been an increasing recognition that this version of Darwinian evolutionary theory is unbalanced and one-sided. Productive and successful as it has been, reductionism is reaching the limits of its explanatory potential, certainly in relation to many of the most urgent problems facing humanity. A revolution in theoretical biology and ecology has seen the re-emergence of the organicist tradition in biology, with a renewed focus on the significance of complexity, emergent dynamics and the interweaving of processes operating simultaneously at different levels of integration (see Quilley 2010). This ongoing paradigm has many sources, including Lyn Margulis's theory of symbiogenesis, James Lovelock's Gaia theory, Stuart Kauffman's reworking of complexity theory, and Buzz Holling's concept of 'panarchy'. Notable attempts to provide synthetic overviews of the emerging intellectual landscape have been provided by Stuart Rose (1997) and more recently Marion Lamb and Eve Jablonka (2005).

What is most interesting is the extent to which interdisciplinarity is becoming once again the default

mode for scientists who aspire to be public intellectuals. At all levels, the most pressing and intellectually exciting scientific problems require a broader vision and the appreciation of links between processes operating at sometimes wildly different levels of integration. Consider, for instance, James Lovelock's comment, in *The Revenge of Gaia*, that, by detecting and possibly deflecting threats from incoming asteroids, technological humanity might come to function as the sentient brain for a biosphere in the process of becoming self-aware. This extraordinary thought echoes the grandiose claims for 'encephalisation' of the planet made by scientific humanists such as Teilhard de Chardin, Julian Huxley, Henri Bergson, Vladimir Vernadsky and Édouard Le Roy in the early-mid twentieth century (Quilley 2010; Sampson and Pitt 1999). If one accepts the extended time-horizon, it also suggests a troubling trade-off between ecological damage in the present and the possible ecological significance of technological civilisation for the deep future. Exemplifying what seems to be a general rule, a great deal depends not just on the point of view but also the 'time of view'.

Elucidating common patterns operating across the entirety of what Elias called 'the great evolution' (2007), Big History synthesises the findings from the full gamut of natural and social science disciplines, from astronomy and geology, to climate science, evolutionary biology, anthropology and neuroscience, and everything in between. This new discipline perfectly captures the renewed interest in synthesis and integration. The modern sensitivity to cosmic evolution emerged in part in the wake of cold war rivalries in the space-race. As Stewart Brand pointed out, the biosphere and the anthroposphere viewed from space presented a cognitive jolt unique in the history of humanity.

'For the first time humanity saw itself from outside. The visible features from space were living blue ocean, living green-brown continents, dazzling polar ice and a busy atmosphere, all set like a delicate jewel in vast immensities of

hard-vacuum space. Humanity's habitat looked tiny, fragile and rare. Suddenly humans had a planet to tend to.' (Brand 2000)

Combined with science-fictional explorations of our deep future and distant past and the possibilities of astro-biology and comparative cosmic civilisation, and against the backdrop of possible nuclear oblivion, the technological achievements of the 1960s and 1970s primed the intellectual culture for a great expansion in temporal horizons. The project of the 'Clock of the Long Now' and the Long Now Foundation lead by Stewart Brand (1999) provided the most graphic exemplar of this new sensibility: that all of recorded history was a blip in a wider process of cosmic evolution; and that human problems, possibilities and interventions were inextricably interwoven with wider biological and physical dynamics unfolding and cycling over much, much longer periods. In many ways, this incipient appreciation of the big picture is part of the long drawn out reorganisation of our temporal means of orientation that first started in the eighteenth century and gained a firm footing with the evolutionary theories of Charles Lyell, James Hutton and Charles Darwin.

The emergence of *Big History as an undergraduate programme* is perhaps evidence of an accelerating shift in this cognitive revolution. The first pioneering courses were taught in the late 1980s by John Mears at Southern Methodist University (Dallas, Texas) and by David Christian at Macquarie University (Australia) and San Diego State University (USA), followed by Johan Goudsblom and (his erstwhile PhD student) Fred Spier at the University of Amsterdam, from 1993. With a high profile TED [Technology, Entertainment and Design conferences] talk by David Christian, the establishment of the International Big History Association and significant sponsorship from the Bill Gates Foundation, the new field is now establishing a significant beachhead in academia (see Resources below).

As a nascent undergraduate discipline, Big History allows students to join

the dots and to make connections between different modules, courses and disciplines. Viewing the past on multiple time scales, the emphasis is on seeking out common themes and patterns. Synthesising the headline findings from cosmology and physics, chemistry and the life sciences, history and anthropology, Big History provides the ultimate Hitch Hiker's Guide – identifying key episodes in the development of complexity in the universe and an underlying order which links the birth of stars with the origins of life and even the current social and ecological crises of civilisation. Focusing on critical threshold moments, the Big History focuses on the 'Goldilocks conditions' – 'not too hot, not too cold ... but just right' – which periodically allowed the emergence of entirely new forms of complexity. The fragility of these pinpricks of complexity and the Goldilocks conditions that sustain them provides a foundation for a more nuanced and long-term view of the possible futures for humanity and the biosphere.

The list of core texts is growing rapidly and includes notable syntheses from David Christian (2005), William McNeill and John McNeil (2003), Eric Chaisson (2001), Johan Goudsblom (1992), Bert De Vries and Goudsblom (2002) and Cynthia Stokes Brown (2012). Fred Spier has made a significant contribution to the field from the outset. *Big History and the Future of Humanity* builds on an earlier book, *The Structure of Big History* (1996). Starting with a concise introduction to the field, the new book follows provides a complete overview of the subject covering cosmic evolution, biological life on earth, human evolution and social development and our current global industrial civilisation as the 'greatest known complexity' in the universe. With regard to this core content, Spier's book is not dissimilar to Christian's *Maps of Time*. However, there are significant differences. Spier's contribution is shorter and perhaps more digestible for an undergraduate audience. He provides, in passing, a superb review of a (predictably) wide range of literatures and the book is worth purchasing for the bibliography

alone. This historiography usefully frames the intellectual prehistory of the ‘macroscopic’ perspective with reference to Alexander Von Humboldt, H. G. Wells and Arnold Toynbee, among others. More significantly, the text is focused, from the outset, on the relevance of Big History as a means of orientation, in relation to issues of long-range governance and sustainability. Where David Christian is preoccupied with the function of Big History as a scientific origin myth and a source of meaning and re-enchantment, Spier’s focus is firmly on humanity ‘facing the future’ (chapter 8). The point of departure for this final chapter is established at the outset with a framework that centres on the relationship between energy flows and complexity. Spier’s contention is ‘that “the energy flows through matter” approach combined with the Goldilocks Principle may provide a first outline of a historical theory of everything, including human history’ (p. 39). His most salutary conclusion is that greater complexity is correspondingly more precarious and difficult to sustain. The long-term survival of human complexity will depend on whether we can constrain an apparently innate propensity ‘to harvest more energy than is needed for survival and reproduction’ (p. 204). The networked connectivity of billions of human brains presents the most astounding (and possibly cosmically rare) degree of complexity. Other things being equal, sustaining such complexity over hundreds of years, let alone millennia (or ‘perpetuity’) is an unlikely prospect. As Spier makes very clear, it will depend on the extent to which humanity is able to develop a more detached picture of its own metabolic constraints, as if from the outside, and using this cognitive guide, begins to internalise entropic constraints on individual, social and institutional patterns of behaviour. In Elias’s terms such a development would constitute an ‘ecological civilising process’ (Quilley 2009).

It is an open question whether the maximum scale of the ‘anthroposphere’ (De Vries and Goudsblom 2002) compatible with ecological integrity overlaps with the minimum scale necessary for a globally connected,

science-based, liberal-cosmopolitan civilisation (Quilley 2011, 2012). Given the significance that Spier attaches to this question, the only (surprising) omission is the lack of attention given to Howard T. Odum’s ‘energy hierarchy’ and the concept of ‘transformity’ (2007). Although technically problematic (Hau and Bakshi 2004), Odum’s framework provides the only serious attempt to quantify the prerequisite thermodynamic relationship between different orders of complexity in general, and the minimum ecological conditions for civilisation in particular (2001). Developing a more precise, quantitative model of the relationship between different levels of complexity seems an important next step if Big History is to become more than a useful heuristic. Having said this, Spier’s text provides an outstanding introduction to Big History and a perfect foundation upon which to consider the human condition ‘in the round’. It should be required reading for sociologists, political scientists, ecologists, politicians and anyone with any interest in ‘sustainability’ or a long-term future for humanity.

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Websites and Resources

The Long Now Foundation: <http://longnow.org/>

The International Big History Association: <http://www.ibhanet.org/>

David Christian has just done a very well received TED talk: http://www.ted.com/talks/david_christian_big_history.html

The field has recently attracted the attention and long term sponsorship of Bill Gates: <http://www.bighistoryproject.com/The-Latest-Word/Bill-Gates-BHP>



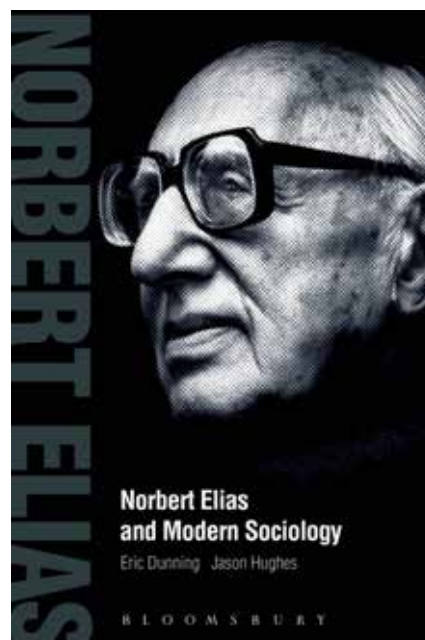
■ RECENT BOOKS AND ARTICLES

Eric Dunning and Jason Hughes, *Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology: Knowledge, Interdependence, Power, Process* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012). xii + 239 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78093-225-5 (hb); 978-1-78903-226-2 (pb).

To say that this book is 'long awaited' is no exaggeration: the authors have been working on it for more than a decade!

Noting that several other books about Elias have appeared previously – they mention those by Richard Kilminster, Johan Goudsblom, Hermann Korte, Robert van Krieken, Jonathan Fletcher, Marc Joly (see below), Cas Wouters and myself – Dunning and Hughes point to three ways in which their book is distinctive. They write:

'The first is that a central focus of the text is upon Elias's sociology of knowledge. ... The second is that



we have attempted to position our discussion ... within the context of a more general crisis, both of sociology as a subject and of the human world at large. Thirdly, ... we have endeavoured throughout this book ... to advance a central line of argument concerning these twin crises [through] our exposition of Elias's work.' (p. 1).

In fact the central argument is that, despite its currently parlous intellectual state, sociology as a discipline is potentially of significance for and benefit to humankind.

The list of chapters will give a good impression of how the authors pursue this ambitious argument:

Introduction: Sociology and its discontents

- 1 Working with Elias
- 2 Some basic concepts of figurational sociology
- 3 Elias's 'Central Theory'
- 4 The development of knowledge and the sciences as social processes
- 5 Problems of method and values in the development of sociological knowledge
- 6 Elias and 'The habits of good sociology'

Conclusion: A relational turn? The future prospects of figurational sociology

The title of chapter 6, a neat play on the mid-nineteenth-century manners book extensively quoted by Elias, *The Habits of Good Society*, has already caused some resentment among other sociologists who do not wish to be taught how to behave as better sociologists. That is a good sign.

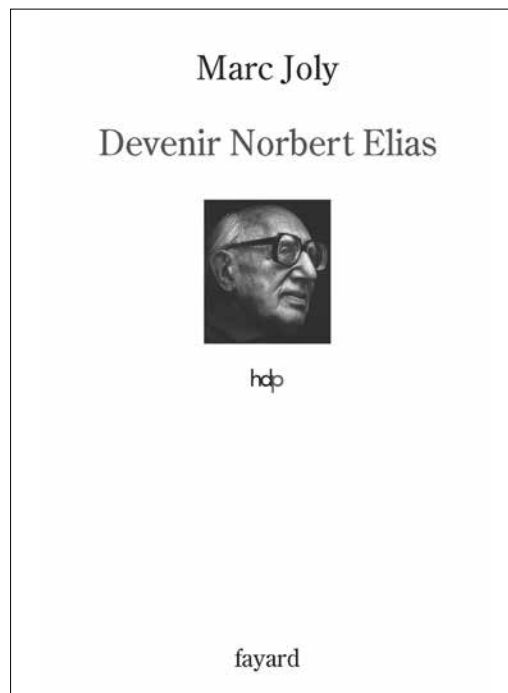
Particularly valuable are the detailed discussions of how Elias compares and contrasts with other figures prominent in recent sociology, such as Bourdieu, Foucault and Giddens. And this book benefits from being written from the perspective of a wide knowledge of the habits – good and, especially, bad – of current empirical social research in many fields.

In short, it was well worth waiting for. Recommended.

Stephen Mennell

Marc Joly, *Devenir Norbert Elias: Histoire croisée d'un processus de reconnaissance scientifique: la réception française* (Paris: Fayard, 2012). 469 pp. ISBN: 978-2-213-66678-5 (pb).

French historians always seem to have served Elias well. He drew extensively on the writings of Achille Luchaire



and others who were writing in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and even between the wars a convergence between the notions of *mentalités* and *longue durée* emerging in the early *Annales* school and Elias's ideas concerning long-term changes in social habitus. (Both parties were influenced by the Dutch historian Johan Huizinga.) Much later, when *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* and *Die höfische Gesellschaft* were published in French translation in the early 1970s, the *annalistes* gave Elias's books a warm welcome. A little later still Roger Chartier, now of the Collège de France, as the by-product of meeting Elias at a conference in Germany, emerged as one of the most effective champions of Elias in France. Of course, the historians were not entirely alone: among historians Pierre Bourdieu became a friend, and French political scientists including Bernard Lacroix have also made extensive use of Elias's ideas. But today historians continue to

appreciate their value and importance. Notable among the new generation of historians are Quentin Deluermoz, who edited the special issue of *Vingtième Siècle* devoted to Elias in 2010 (see *Figurations* 33; now reprinted as a book: see below), and Marc Joly, who so brilliantly edited (or rather reconstructed) the essay on Freud that Elias was writing at the very end of his life (see *Figurations* 37).

Now Fayard have published Marc Joly's doctoral thesis, and the book has already attracted a lot of interest in France. In outward form, as the title suggests, it is a study in intellectual history, tracing the tangled path leading to Elias's emergence as a 'great figure in sociology', with a particular focus upon the French part of the story. But it is much more than that. Joly has probed the archives in London, Leicester and Marbach, and unearthed much that is new. He corrects the 'partial misunderstanding' prevalent in France that Elias was simply a sort of precursor to the *Annales* school. And he very interestingly situates the reception of Elias in France

in the aftermath of 1968. He is an excellent guide to how Elias relates to such other intellectual megastars as Lévi-Strauss and Braudel.

This is not just a history. Marc Joly has made himself a major expert on Elias's work *per se*, and his book can serve as a general introduction. He is a powerful advocate for the continuing relevance of Elias for the human sciences at large.

Érik Neveu, 'Elias, Wouters et la théorie de l'*informalisation*: Un outil conceptuel pour sociologiser des régimes émotionnels et leurs effets' [Elias, Wouters and the theory of informalisation: a conceptual tool for sociologising emotional regimes and their effects], in Isabelle Sommier and Xavier Crettiez (eds), *Les Dimensions émotionnelles du politique: Chemins de traverse avec Philippe Braud* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), pp. 273–90.

Érik Neveau, Director of Sciences Po, Rennes, and one of the organisers of the memorable ‘Colloque International Norbert Elias’ held in Rennes in October 2000 (see *Figurations* 14), argues for the relevance to political scientists not just of Elias’s theory of civilising processes, but especially of Cas Wouters’s elaboration of the process of informalisation. This essay presents a useful and comprehensive account of Wouters’s key ideas, including the ‘lusty balance between love and sex’ and (still controversial) of a transition from a ‘second nature’ to a ‘third nature’ dominant habitus.

Behrouz Alikhani, *Institutionelle Entdemokratisierungsprozesse: Zum Nachhineffekt des sozialen Habitus in Frankreich, Iran und Deutschland* [Institutional de-democratisation: the drag effect in social habitus in France, Iran and Germany] (Wiesbaden: Springer VS, 2012). 303 pp. ISBN 978-3-531-19307-6 (pb); 978-3-531-19308-3 (eBook).

This important book is Behrouz Alikhani’s doctoral thesis at the University of Hanover, where it was supervised by Dawud Gholamasud. Part I presents a critique of theories concerning the failure of the ‘constitutaional revolution’, with special reference to the de-democratisation of the constitutional monarchy in Iran (1906–25). This is followed by an outline of Elias’s understanding of processes of democratisation, its incorporation in Gholamasud’s three-dimensional model of democracy, and comparison of the personality structures associated with parliamentary and autocratic–dynastic states. Part II deals with institutional de-democratisation in France and Germany: France during the Second Republic (1848–52), drawing upon Marx’s and Tocqueville’s contemporary writings about that, and Germany in the Weimar Republic (drawing, of course, on Elias). Part III returns to the decline of the Iranian constitutional monarchy and its overthrow by Reza Shah.

No better example could be found of the relevance of ‘historical’ sociology – and, more exactly, of Elias’s ‘process

sociology’ – to understanding the world at the present day. One cannot help wondering whether, if more leading Americans had a better knowledge of Iranian history, they could continue to behave as idiotically towards the country as they do.

SJM

Quentin Deluermoz (ed.), *Norbert Elias et le XX^e siècle: Le processus de civilisation à l’épreuve* (Paris: Perrin, 2012). 443 pp. ISBN: 978-2-262-03902-8.

This is a handy pocket-book version of the special issue of the journal *Vingtième siècle* published in 2010 (see *Figurations* 33), with slightly revised and updated contributions.

Farhad Dalal, *Thought Paralysis: The Virtues of Discrimination* (London: Karnac, 2012). x + 246 pp. ISBN: 978-1-7804-9055-6.

Farhad Dalal is a practising Group Analyst, whose writings have played a key part in the reception of Norbert Elias’s ideas back into the theory and practice of the Group Analytic Society of which Elias was a founder. Particularly notable was Dalal’s book *Taking the Group Seriously: Towards a Post-Foulkesian Group Analytic Theory* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 1998 – see *Figurations* 10), and his next book, *Race, Colour and Racialisation* (Hove: Brunner–Routledge, 2002) also covered territory of interest to figurational sociologists.

His new book is perhaps his most courageous to date. As he remarks, his status as an Indian-born British citizen makes it possible for him to advance an argument that would no doubt be badly received if put forward by a standard ‘white British’ author. In good Eliasian fashion, he seeks to break down a static false polarity. He walks a thin line between the apologists who deify ‘difference’ and the zealots and bigots who vilify the different. He argues that in order to create a fairer world, we need to enhance our capacities for discrimination, not stifle them. Early in the book, he tells a vivid story about a

father whose son lost his job and moved back in with his parents, and then fell into total inactivity, lethargically watching daytime television. Finally, the father told the son that this was not good enough, and that he should pull himself together ... and so on. Whereupon his wife, the lad’s mother, denounced her husband for ‘being judgmental’. The husband ended up in confusion, depression and ultimately therapy. This incident has nothing in itself to do with the question of relations between ethnic minorities and majorities, or more generally between established and outsiders, but it brilliantly captures the thrust of Dalal’s argument. The chapter titles also give a strong flavour:

The struggle to live and let live: the liberal world view
 Equal strokes for different folks: the legislature
 Manufacturing kinds of people: processes of inclusion and exclusion
 The human condition: psychology
 Counting discriminations
 Corrupting the liberal ideal: diversity in organisational life
 Perverting the liberal ideal: fear and control in the Panopticon
 The difference that dare not speak its name: the Lexicon Police
 Islam: the new black
 Tolerating discrimination: discriminating tolerance
 The road to nowhere: conceptual cul-de-sacs

This is not just a courageous book, but quite as brilliant as Dalal’s earlier works.

SJM

Stephen Vertigans, *The Sociology of Terrorism: People Places and Processes* (London: Routledge, 2012). xiv + 214 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-57265-1 (hb); 978-0-415-57266-8 (pb); 978-0-203-85581-2 (ebk).

Stephen Vertigans begins his book by decrying the virtual absence of sociology and sociologists from debates about terrorism and counter-terrorism. (Sometimes one wonders whether the list of topics deemed beyond the

scope of sociology by most mainstream representatives of the discipline is becoming longer than the list of topics deemed appropriate for their attention.) Political science, International Relations, and psychology are more heavily represented in the field, but, Vertigans points out, stereotypes abound and are often connected with prevailing opinions about other ethnic groups and religions. Thus, for instance religion becomes the explanation for al-Qa'ida, while a whole range of other factors leading people to become violent in the name of Islam are ignored.

Thus setting out his stall on the first page of his book, Vertigans proceeds to offer a thoroughly figurational perspective on terrorism, emphasising the necessity of a long-term, processual perspective on the problem. Chapter 2 deals with the historical legacy of political violence, and chapter 3 with the classic Eliasian question of processes of habitus formation: how terrorism is linked to the sociogenesis of violent dispositions. There follow discussions of how people become terrorists, how terrorist groups are formed, the dynamics of such groups, and the emotions and rationales that govern them. All along, a relatively detached view is developed of a topic that has been marked by relatively more involved viewpoints.

This outstanding book deserves a longer review – which it will indeed receive in our sister publication, the journal *Human Figurations* – but perhaps this is enough to indicate how a figurational perspective can contribute to a broader understanding of a matter of intense political debate.

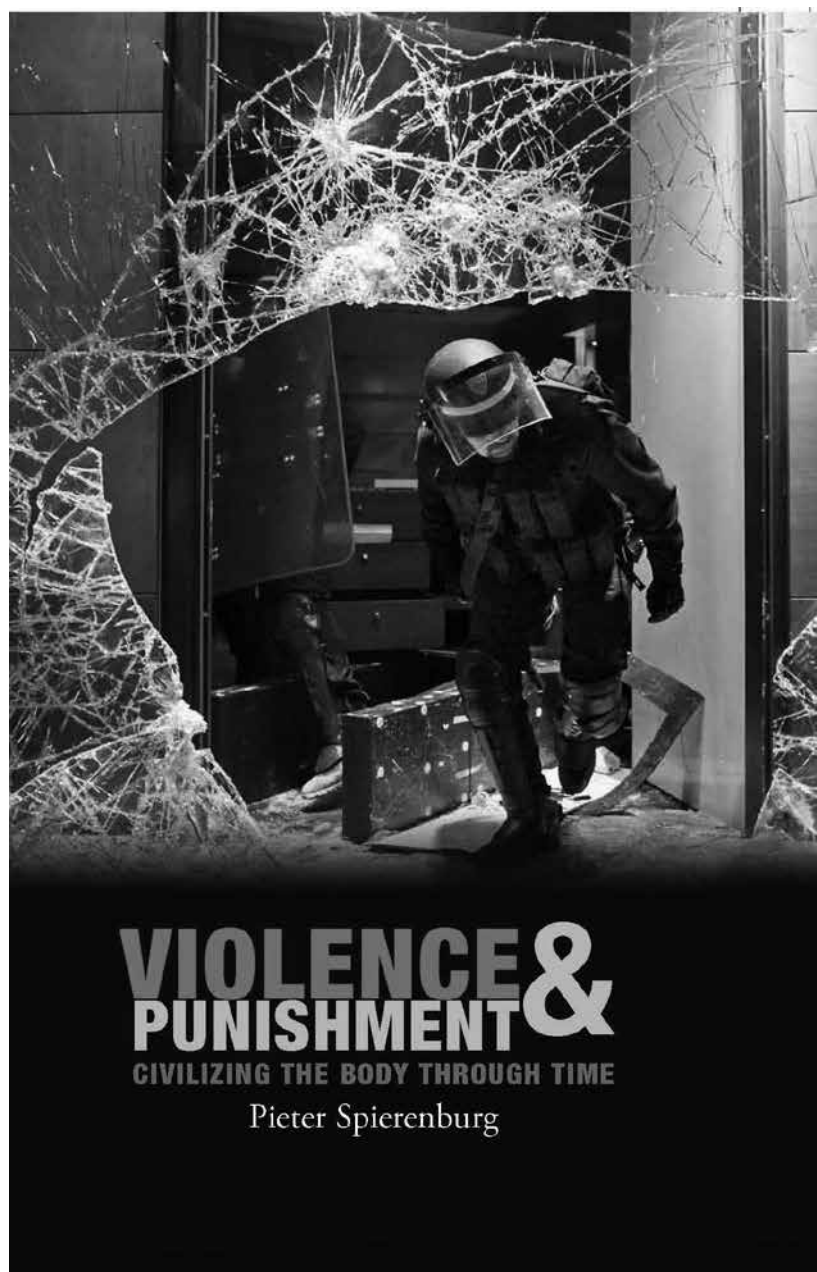
Pieter Spierenburg, *Violence and Punishment: Civilizing the Body through Time* (Cambridge: Polity, 2012). vi + 223 pp. ISBN: 978-0-7456-5348-8 (hb); 978-0-7456-5349-5 (pb).

Throughout his career, Pieter Spierenburg has done as much as any other historian to demonstrate the power of Elias's theory of civilising processes in understanding long-term trends in violence (especially

homicide). His earlier book, *The Spectacle of Suffering: Executions and the Evolution of Suffering* (Cambridge University Press, 1984) is a classic, which should have ensured (but did not) that no one ever again treated Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* as holy writ. Spierenburg's writings, although largely based on research in Dutch archives, has had particular impact in the USA. His 2006 article 'Democracy came too early: a tentative explanation for the problem of American homicide' (*American Historical Review*, 111: 1, pp. 104–14) is regularly cited every time some nutter in America goes berserk with an assault rifle and slaughters a dozen or two children

or students. The argument was that in Western Europe states established relatively effective monopolisation of the means of violence under autocratic monarchies and that, when power became more widely dispersed within states, the struggle was not to destroy the monopoly but to 'co-possess' it. In America, by contrast, democracy arrived before monopolisation and internal pacification had gone very far, and (largely by accident and misunderstanding) the right of individual Americans to go out and kill their fellow-citizens was enshrined as a fundamental freedom.

The present book is in effect a collection of essays brought together in



intellectual unity by a forthright championing of the theory of civilising processes. The chapter titles are:

Introduction: Violence and punishment within civilizing processes

- 1 Long-Term trends in homicide: Amsterdam, fifteenth–twentieth centuries
- 2 Homicide and the law in the Dutch Republic: a peaceful country?
- 3 Violence and culture: bloodshed in two or three worlds
- 4 Punishment, power and history: Foucault and Elias
- 5 Monkey Butt's Mate: On Informal Social Control, Standards of Violence and Notions of Privacy
- 6 'The green, green grass of home': reflections on capital punishment and the penal system in Europe and America from a long-term perspective
- 7 Elites and etiquette: changing standards of personal conduct in the Netherlands until 1800
- 8 Civilising celebrations: an exploration of the festive universe
- 9 The body's end: death and paradise in human history

Epilogue: A personal recollection of Norbert Elias and how I became a crime historian

Angela Perulli (ed.), *Fare sviluppo: Identità, luoghi, trasformazioni sociali in un'area della Toscana* [Doing development: identity, places, social transformation in an area of Tuscany] (Milan: FrancoAngeli, 2009). 248 pp.

This book reports on sociological studies of Pistoia and its area, with chapter authors including such figures familiar from figurational gatherings as – besides Angela Perulli herself – Paolo Giovannini and Filippo Buccarelli

Peter Imbusch (ed.) (2012): *Macht und Herrschaft: Sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien und Konzeptionen*, 2nd revised and enlarged version (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2012). Article: 'Figurations of power and processes of domination in the work of Norbert Elias', pp. 169–93.

Peter Imbusch (University of Wuppertal) not only edited this

book about theories of "Power and Domination" where he also wrote the article about the concept of power in the process and figurational sociology of Norbert Elias. Starting with the statements of Elias with regard to the importance of power for societal relations, the author reconstructs the widely neglected aspect of power in the sociological thinking of Norbert Elias. Elias himself considered power to be the central problem of sociology. The peculiarity of Elias' concept – somewhere in between Weber and Foucault – can be seen in its multilevel scope to address micro-level interactions as well as power relations between groups and in society as a whole. Power is seen by Elias as the special range of individual decision making that is linked to societal positions, therefore it can be seen as an expression of a chance to decide about the fate of other people. Elias considers power as the capacity of any person to redirect social relations to his own ideas and interests. Power is woven into all kinds of relations between people. After clarifying the understanding of power by Elias, Imbusch considers the central terminological aspects of his concept (e.g. balance of power, power chances, differentials of power). Afterwards, he showed how to make fruitful use of the term power and how Elias used it to understand important developments in society. Imbusch first looked at the historical dimensions of power shifts between groups and classes in the sense of a historical sociology to explain long term democratisation. Then he pointed to the early European court to show one of Elias major examinations with power as an important but complex resource in a net of interdependent relationships. A third aspect where Elias deals with power is social inequality. Here, the author takes established-outsider-relations to make clear how power works and what effects it produces. A fourth aspect only seldom mentioned is related to the problematic of domination and the use of violence as power. Elias is quite clear in his writings to differentiate the qualities of power, to look for regime changes and revolutions as changes in power relations and to consider domination as a result of power consolidation.

Resuming the centrality of power in Elias' sociology, Imbusch demonstrates that power is a core concept in the thinking of Norbert Elias about history and society that deserves a much more prominent status than it actually has.

Artur Bogner and Gabriele Rosenthal, 'The 'untold' stories of outsiders and their relevance for the analysis of (post-)conflict figurations. Interviews with victims of collective violence in northern Uganda (West Nile)', *Sociologus* 62: 2 (Autumn 2012).

We have conducted interviews with women and men who are victims of collective violence in the region of West Nile in northern Uganda, by the hands either of rebels or members of various government armies. We show the position and relevancy of their perspectives in public discourses in and about this region. Using biographical-narrative interviews and group discussions, we highlight how their voices are subdued in public discourses in which ex-rebels present themselves as victims of history. The interviews illustrate that the narrative interview method is of help also in this non-European research setting as it supports the interviewees to verbalise what they have suffered.

The analysis of how collective violence is thematised in the interviews as well as in public discourses brings about important insights into the perspectivity and the biases of these discourses – and how these were generated. The authors use a figurational approach based on Elias's theories of established–outsiders figurations and we-images to understand the interaction between dominant we-images in public discourses and the interpretation and remembering of armed violence. As their analysis shows, it is important for studying the region's recent history as well as (post-)conflict figurations in general to accommodate the biographical experiences of victims of collective violence.

Andrew Linklater, 'Norbert Elias, Process Sociology and *International Relations*' (12th May 2012).



Andrew's article has had over five and a half thousands hits, but for what we may know, the figures might have doubled by now! If you would like to add to this number, here is the link:

URL: <http://www.e-ir.info/2012/05/29/norbert-elias-process-sociology-and-international-relations/>

Abstract: The influence of social theory on the study of international relations has been profound in recent years, and interest in historical sociology continues to grow. Many scholars have used concepts and perspectives in those fields to advance their area of specialisation. More often than that, they have imported modes of analysis that have not been used explicitly to understand international relations. They have looked to scholars who are not specialists in the discipline and who display little, if any, familiarity with the relevant literature. What is found attractive in their work is not their existing explanation of international relations or world politics then, but methods and orientations that are regarded as valuable for advancing the field.

Norbert Elias is an interesting exception to the general trend because over approximately six decades his writings returned repeatedly to the problem of violence in relations between states.

Amanda Rohloff, 'Climate change, moral panic, and civilisation: On the development of global warming as a social problem'. Unpublished doctoral thesis; Brunel University, London (2012)

Abstract: This study combines moral panic with the figurational sociology of Norbert Elias to explore how climate change has developed as a social problem. The central argument is that, through combining the short-term focus of moral panic with the long-term focus of Elias, we can examine the interplay between planned and unplanned developments in both the perception and reality of climate change.

The first part of the research consisted of discourse analysis of a variety of different texts from 1800 to the present. These were used to explore the long-term development of climate change as emerging from an ecological civilising process. The second stage of the research related these developments to moral panics, arguing that the emergence of climate change can only be understood by exploring the interplay between long-term processes and short-term campaigns.

The third part of the research explored these historical developments at the individual level, examining the notion of individual ecological civilising processes. Fifteen semi-structured interviews were undertaken with climate change 'activists' and 'non-activists', comparing how their biographical developments related to ecological civilising processes and moral panics.

The final part of the research compared climate change with five other empirical examples of moral panics, to explore the civilising and decivilising processes and civilising offensives that occur before, during, and after the panics. The central aim was to demonstrate the complexity of moral panics, and to aid in the reformulation of the concepts of moral panic and decivilisation.

Through a synthesis of Elias and moral panic, as applied to the example of climate change, this study aimed:

to critically assess the development of climate change; to reassess the concept of decivilisation and the relation between civilising processes and offensives; and to reformulate the concept of moral panic, including suggesting how moral panic research ought to be undertaken.

The thesis is currently being written up as a book, *Climate Change, Moral Panics, and Civilisation*, to be published with Routledge (2014). And for those who have an interest in moral panics, Amanda Rohloff, along with Chas Critcher, Jason Hughes, and Julian Petley, are in the final stages of completing an edited book, *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World*, to be published with Bloomsbury (2013) – Elias features in the editors' introduction and one other chapter.

Here is [the](#) full list of Amanda's publications:

Amanda Rohloff, 'Extending the concept of moral panic: Elias, climate change and civilisation', *Sociology* 45: 4 (2011), pp. 634–49.

Amanda Rohloff, 'Shifting the focus? Moral panics as civilising and decivilising processes', in Sean P. Hier (ed.), *Moral Panic and the Politics of Anxiety* (London: Routledge, 2011), pp. 71–85.

Amanda Rohloff and Sarah Wright, 'Moral panic and social theory: beyond the heuristic', *Current Sociology* 58: 3 (2010), pp. 403–419.

John R. Deakins, *Making Sense of Us: An Essay on Human Meaning* (Vancouver, BC: Granville Island Publishing, 2011). xvi + 207 pp. ISBN 978-1-894694-76-6.

This book does not actually refer to Elias or figurational sociology, but the author wrote to the editor of *Figurations* that 'I have come very late to encountering Elias's writings, but, after somewhat recovered from my initial euphoria at having found that his thinking was very close to my own, I was then able to entertain the fantasy that I might myself have encountered

him in person when I was a student in the French Department many years ago at what was then the University College Leicester. At that time (I'm specifically thinking of the academic year 1955–56) there was already a tradition that all faculty – from all departments – and all students, regardless of discipline, to meet informally for Saturday morning coffee in “Crush Hall”. It is not beyond the bounds of possibility that Norbert Elias and I might have inadvertently rubbed shoulders ...’ Readers are invited to read John Deakins’s book to see how much inadvertently rubbed off!

Florence Delmotte and Ludivine Damay, ‘Les schemas directeurs, nouvel outil du développement urbain à Bruxelles: interdépendances entre acteurs et processus de construction d’espaces’, in Yves Bonny, Sylvie Ollitrault, Régis Keerle and Yvon Le Caro (eds), *Espaces de vie, espaces enjeux* (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2012), pp. 273–86.

Matt Clement, ‘The urban outcasts of the British city’, in Will Atkinson, Steven Roberts and Mike Savage (eds), *Class Inequality in Austerity Britain: Power, Difference and Suffering* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 111–27.

In their different ways, both of the above essays illustrate how the processual thinking of Elias has been influencing researchers in the field of urban sociology. Delmotte and Damay are concerned with the management of space in Brussels since 1989, when it ceased to be simply the capital of a Belgian unitary state and became the third bilingual ‘region’ between Dutch-soaking Flanders and French-speaking Wallonia. They make use of such concepts as ‘functional democratisation’.

Matt Clement, in partial contrast, has specialised in studying social problems in the city of Bristol, in the West of England. In recent years Britain has been experiencing not just an abstract ‘austerity’, but rising unemployment and poverty, urban riots, and a ballooning prison population. This chapter unravels some of the processes

underlying this scenario by examining the conditions and experiences of young people whose exclusion from school and inclusion in the institutions of the criminal justice system are intensely interwoven. It traces and critiques nationwide developments and policy, before moving on to two more refined case studies to put flesh on the argument’s bones: the London riots of August 2011 and the social changes occurring in the western Bristol.

Maria José de Rezende, ‘Democratisation as a process of distribution, movement and balance of power in Norbert Elias’ [in Portuguese], *Reflexión Política* [Colombia] 14: 27 (2012), pp. 39–53.

ABSTRACT: The purpose of this study is to map within Norbert Elias’s books *On the Process of Civilisation*, *The Court Society* and *Studies on the Germans* the central aspects of the reflections proposed by Elias on the long clashes that occurred over several centuries, which sought to promote, prevent or stop the distribution of power that is considered by him as the core of civilising processes. The foundation of all changes in respect to the generation of new opportunities of power to those groups until then deprived from resources of command and decision, must be sought in figurational games full of multi-polar tensions that are formed as a result of constant shifts of power, driving new demands, new conflicts and new confrontations. The way each society responds to these tensions is in the basis of the (im)possibility of construction of both procedures and personalities increasingly democratic.

Christien Brinkgreve, *Het Verlangen naar Gezag: Over vrijheid, gelijkheid en verlies van houvast* [‘The desire for authority: on liberty, equality and loss of support’] (Amsterdam: Atlas-Contact, 2012), 256 pp.

We have not received a copy of this book, and cannot summarise it, but we include this note to record a publication by a prominent member of the figurational family!



■ TANGENTIAL

Hans Belting, *Florence and Baghdad: Renaissance Art and Arab Science*, trans Deborah Lucas Schneider (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011). 303 pp. ISBN: 978 0 05004 4.

Readers of *Figurations* will know that Norbert Elias originally intended to write his *Habilitationschrift* for Alfred Weber on the common origins of the modern arts and sciences in Renaissance Florence. His plan for the thesis can be found in *Early Writings* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2006 [Collected Works, vol. 1]), pp. 111–23. The thesis was never completed, although some of its planned themes crop up much later, in *Essays I: On the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sciences* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2009 [Collected Works, vol. 14]).

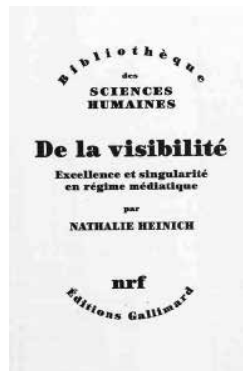
Hans Belting's book tackles a closely related question, but with a distinctive twist. The gist of his thesis, to quote the review by Julian Bell in the *London Review of Books*, 25 October 2012, is that 'the perspective familiar to Western modernity is an application of a visual geometry devised within classical Islam'. In particular, Belting's argument is that such key figures of Renaissance Florence as Filippo Brunelleschi were drawing upon the work of Ibn al-Haytham (known in the West as Alhazen), written three or four centuries earlier and translated into Latin in Muslim Spain around 1200 AD under the title *Perspectiva*.

On science in the classical Islamic world generally, an excellent introduction is Jim Al-Khalili, *Pathfinders: The Golden Age of Arabic Science* (London: Allen Lane, 2010).

■ BOOKS RECEIVED

These two important books will be jointly reviewed in the next issue of *Figurations*:

Robert van Krieken, *Celebrity Society* (London: Routledge, 2012). xi + 200 pp. ISBN 13: 9780415581509 (paperback; also available in hardback).



Nathalie Heinich, *De la visibilité* (Paris: Gallimard, 2012).

■ RECENT CONFERENCES

Reinventing Norbert Elias: For an Open Sociology
Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research,
22–23 June 2012

The organisers of this conference, Rineke van Daalen and Giselinde Kuipers, eloquently expressed its purpose as follows:

‘The Department of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam has a special relationship to the work of Norbert Elias. Many people working in this department were inspired by Elias’ work. Moreover, Elias spent the last years of his long life in Amsterdam. Today, Elias has acquired a place in the galleries of modern classical sociologists. He is now recognized as pioneer in such divergent fields as relational sociology, historical sociology, the sociology of sports, culture, organizations, and emotions. A new generation of sociologists, in the Netherlands and elsewhere, is exploring new ways to read and use the work of Elias.

This conference aims to rethink Norbert Elias’ sociology for the 21st century. How can figurational sociology contribute to current sociological debates? What is the place of Elias in today’s social scientific landscape? How can the insights and concepts of figurational sociology be developed further? Are Elias’ critiques of mainstream sociology still valid? Is figurational sociology a paradigm in itself; or rather a perspective to be used alongside others?

By bringing together different ways of working with Elias’ legacy, we hope to arouse interest in new ways of using this legacy, among students and academics. Our aim is to build an open sociology, in the footsteps of Elias: a sociology characterized by a broad approach and a marked disregard of disciplinary boundaries, a keen eye for the embodied and emotional as well as the calculating and rational aspects of human behaviour, asking wide-ranging comparative and historical questions, and always reflexive about the sociological endeavour itself.’

These objectives were very clearly achieved. Participants came from far and near – including the USA and Israel as well as many parts of Europe – and the abstracts of all the papers delivered over a very busy two days cannot be printed here. (The book of abstracts can be obtained by emailing the conference organisers.) A few photos will have to suffice.

From top:

Another intense session in progress;

Jason Hughes, Cas Wouters and a display of Cas’s book; Elke and Hermann Korte.



■ FORTHCOMING CONFERENCES:

Civilising Bodies: Literature, rhetoric, and image, 1700 to the present day



April 2013, University of Exeter
Centre for Medical History at
the University of Exeter is holding an
interdisciplinary conference open to
postgraduates and academics at any
level.

The narratives, discourses, and imagery
of bodies and their relationship with
civilisation have affected a diverse
range of media, from novels, poetry,
and political tracts to art and film, and
we are eager for submissions examining
a wide a range of sources from 1700 to
the present day.

We welcome abstracts that examine
issues surrounding the themes of bodies
and civilisation and their relationship to
literature and the arts from researchers
of any discipline, including History, Art
History, Film Studies, Cultural Studies
and Literature.

Topics and themes may include:
discourses of progress; concepts of
savagery and barbarism; the science
of race; ailments of civilisation;
medicine and modernity; mental health;
sexuality and the body; issues of class
and gender; the politics of medical
language; theoretical or speculative
pieces

Guest Speakers

Dr Lesley Hall (Wellcome Library)
Professor Mark Jackson (University of
Exeter)

We invite applicants to submit abstracts
of up to 300 words for 20 minute
papers (previously unpublished), to
civilisingbodies@gmail.com by 14
January 2012 with the 'subject' of the
email as 'Civilising Bodies abstract'.

Once the deadline has passed a panel
will review the abstracts anonymously
and applicants will receive a decision
and feedback on their submissions.
If your paper is not selected we very

much hope you will still be able to
attend the conference and participate in
the discussion.

The conference's official website is:
[http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/medhist/
conferences/Civilising%20Bodies/
index.shtml](http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/medhist/conferences/Civilising%20Bodies/index.shtml)

Habitus, War and Civilisation

*Department of Sociology, University of
Graz.*

Graz 25–27 April 2013

Call for papers

This conference is to honour Helmut
Kuzmics on the occasion of his
retirement from his chair at Graz
in May 2103. Over the last decade,
Helmut's work has centred especially
on matters relating to war, but over
the course of his career he has written
on a wide range of topics, including
national habitus, the arts, mass media
and culture, and sociological theory. We
shall welcome papers, or proposals for
conference sessions, on the whole range
of his work. In the area specifically of
war and the bellicose side of social life,
we already envisage several sessions:

Proposed sessions centred on war

Today, interstate wars merely
disappeared or transformed into
terrorism or into violent inner-states
antagonisms of far remotes 'failed
states'. However, this does not mean
that war (and the potential of it) has lost
its significance for modern societies.
Twenty years after the breakdown of
the Soviet Union, more states than ever
are acquiring nuclear weapons, a new
kind of arms race with conventional
weapons can be observed in parts of
the world, and popular culture is still
obsessed with war (as in movies and
computer games).

Merely 30 years after Elias's *Humana
Conditio* it seems that sociology
itself has not changed fundamentally.
Following Saint Simon, sociology is
still concerned with the paradigm of
modern society as a peaceful place.
Thus, the aim of the conference is to
confront sociological thinking with

war and its social consequences. The
conference is open for proposals
for plenary sessions. The following
sessions are proposed by the organizers.

1 War and its effect on societies in a
very long-term perspective
What are the effects of war on historical
civilisations as well as on the modern
world? In order to explain societies
better, are there war-orientated points
of view in sociology that are able
successfully to rival functionalism or
economic-centred paradigms?

2. Nuclear deterrence: Making unsafe
places safer or even more insecure?
Political science has much to say about
the proliferation of nuclear weapons.
However, what is the sociological
perspective? How are aggressive
impulses and hate towards others
regulated differently in the nuclear age?
Is such a kind of weaponry constitutive
for modern societies?

3. War, emotions and 'habitus'
In order to understand war crimes and
atrocities, a micro-level perspective on
the battlefield uncovers the fundamental
importance of emotions like fear,
comradeship etc. Emotions are also
central to understand public opinion
and its judgement about a 'just' war.
In this session, the interconnection of
war, emotions and 'habitus' will be
discussed.

4. War, the economic system and
financial markets
What are the relations between
capitalism, tighter nets of economic
interdependencies and war? Does the
current world economic crisis lead
towards situations that will make war
between great powers more likely?
Or is it true that the conditions are
very different from the world of the
1930s?

5. Rituals of civilising interstate
violence



The mass media focus on sport, the
Eurovision Song Contest, beauty
contests, the Nobel prizes, film prizes
and many other cultural contests as
rivalries between nations. Does modern
civilisation develop certain sets of
rituals helping to constrain violent
impulses on the international arena?

Does IR (International Relations) neglect these contests as important institutions?


6 Popular Culture and Civilisation.
See the call for papers below

The conference will consist of plenary sessions with speakers and panels of discussants.

The deadline for registering for the conference, and for submitting abstracts of papers, is 31 January 2013.

To register, please send an abstract to following email address: dieter.reicher@uni-graz.at

Call for Papers for a Session on Popular Culture and Civilisation, Graz, 25–27 April 2013

Email 300-word abstract plus bio to Jason Hughes at jason.hughes@brunel.ac.uk. Deadline for abstracts:  **January 2013**

Elias had excellent sociological reasons for selecting the term ‘civilisation’ to bear the conceptual weight of his theoretical approach. As he discusses in the opening to *On the Process of Civilisation*, the term ‘Kultur’, particularly in its German usage, has retained certain connotations from its specific sociogenesis – stressing introspection, difference, uniqueness. ‘Civilisation’, on the other hand, has sociological value because of its emphasis on development: for its application as a term which invites comparison, contrast, and which is always attuned to processes of becoming. Culture, particularly in the anthropological usage, has largely emerged unchallenged as a technical term. The distinction between culture in the technical and normative sense of the world is by now so deeply ingrained in Western academic traditions that it hardly needs to be stated. Civilisation, by contrast, remains highly contested, seemingly unable to shake off the hangovers of the normative usage as a watchword for colonising groups, particularly its mobilisation in the name of Western superiority, progress,


and the domination of ‘others’.

Yet, arguably, civilisation, or more specifically (to use Elias’s technical term) ‘civilising processes’, with its structure and process connotations, remains sociologically useful and encompasses much that is normally considered in relation to studies and analyses of ‘culture’. This presents an enduring problem for ‘figurational’ scholars: how does ‘culture’, particularly ‘popular culture’, ‘fit’ within the conceptual scheme and the approach to research developed by Elias? What is the ontological and epistemological status of ‘cultural artefacts’? Might popular culture constitute a vehicle for standards of socially acceptable behaviour, one that follows in a line of succession from previous modes of arbitration, such as manners texts, aristocratic edicts, and spoken (and eventually unspoken) codes of etiquette? Where do studies of popular culture stand in relation to analyses of civilising processes? How might a contemporary researcher locate research into say film, television, new media, in the context of longer-term processes of development? How might one reconcile Elias’ (and others’) work with ‘media studies’ and other analyses of popular culture?

We invite papers that explore the relationship between popular culture and civilisation, exploring these questions amongst others. We would particularly welcome papers which are research-based, and which grapple with the problems of combining an engagement with long-term processes with a contemporary empirical focus.

■ OBITUARY

In Memoriam: Amanda Rohloff (1982–2012)

Dr Amanda Rohloff, who died aged 30 on  December 2012, was an extremely gifted academic who had just embarked on a promising career as a sociologist.

Mandy was born in 1982 and grew up in Wellington, New Zealand, the youngest of three children (her two brothers, Jason and Colin) born to Judy and Maurie Rohloff. She excelled at hockey as a teenager, and won a number of awards and trophies through her participation in the sport. She was a very able student at school, performing sufficiently well to gain access to the Victoria University of Wellington. At VUW, Amanda first studied for a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in Anthropology, Criminology and Sociology, graduating in 2005. It was the sociological component of this degree, particularly the lectures by David Pearson, that awakened her intellectual passions and energies. In 2007, she completed a BA Honours in Sociology, achieving an outstanding result: a first class degree with grades of A+, A+, A+ and A. Upon graduation, Mandy won an LB Wood Travelling Scholarship from the New Zealand Vice Chancellors’ Committee. While still an undergraduate she had made contact with Stephen Mennell – an old friend of David Pearson’s – who recommended her to go to Brunel University, London, to study for her PhD with me. The scholarship enabled her to move to the UK, and at Brunel she was also awarded the Peter Caws Prize (of which she was the first ever recipient) and an Overseas Research Student Award. Her thesis examined climate change and the sociological concept of ‘Moral Panic’.

Essentially, Mandy’s aim with her thesis was to use the case of increasing public concern about climate change as a kind of empirical testing ground in relation to which she would integrate an analysis of short-term ‘moral panics’ with a consideration of much longer-term civilising and decivilising processes. My first thought on discussing the thesis topic with her



at our initial supervision session was that she might be a climate change denier (she was anything but) – surely this was something about which ‘we’ were not panicking enough? But, as she soon pointed out to me, this (common) reaction to her research topic said as much about the received ideological baggage of the moral panic heuristic – for example, that by definition such ‘panics’ were inevitably disproportional and ‘misguided’ – as it did about our own increasing sensitivity towards the environment, in turn linked to widening circles of mutual identification.

Through examining long-term shifts in public and scientific understandings of, and attitudes towards, climate change, Mandy traced the ascendancy of a ‘carbon temperance’ movement – a ‘greening’ of demands to restrain and curb our excessive consumption of the planet’s finite resources. Today, the movement finds its clearest expression in guides to ‘ethical’ living; in the rise of corporate ‘environmental statements’; and, for instance, in growing demands for ‘right thinking’ individuals to account for and ‘offset’ the carbon emissions that result from the pursuit of interests relating to work, leisure and spare time activities. Mandy explored the implications of such developments, ultimately considering whether these contributed to facilitating

a concerted human response to the challenges of climate change, or indeed, greater denial and ignorance of the problem and a reluctance to ‘act’ in meaningful ways.

Along with a time-series analysis of various documentary sources, Mandy also conducted a number of interviews with environmental activists and non-activists. She pilot-tested her interview questions on me. I remember feeling exhausted at the end of the interview. In the space of about 30 minutes her probing questions and prompts had laid bare my own deeply personal – and, I might add, entirely contradictory and inconsistent – stance on climate change. Mandy had a highly penetrating academic mind, and treated almost everything in life, including her own personal challenges, with acute scientific interest. Such challenges included a medical condition – epilepsy – which commenced, seemingly from nowhere, after her first seizure in 2004. It was typical of Mandy that she accepted her illness without complaint, and doggedly refused to let it get in the way of doing whatever she wanted. Most recently, she commenced some sociological research on people with epilepsy, and had conducted endless personal experiments with diet and nutrition to manage her own condition.

However, it was this illness that, sadly, appears to have been the primary cause of her death.

At Brunel, Mandy immersed herself in university life, soon becoming centrally engaged with the staff–student liaison committee, and subsequently becoming a prominent School representative for postgraduate research students. She later came to take the lead in a series of initiatives, perhaps the most notable of which was her role in organising the ‘Moral Panics in the Contemporary World’ conference that took place at Brunel in December 2010. The conference was a highly successful international event attended by in excess of 120 participants, including some of the most prominent names in the academic field such as Stanley Cohen and Jock Young. Other key speakers included high-profile journalists such as the BBC Panorama documentary maker, James Oliver whose programme on the ‘Baby P’ affair sparked a major national debate about social care and child protection in the UK. The conference attracted considerable highly positive media attention including, the from the *Times Higher Educational Supplement*, BBC Radio 4’s *Thinking Allowed*, and the British Sociological Association (BSA) newsletter *Network*. It is testament

to Mandy's superb organisational skills that the conference actually turned in a not insubstantial profit. The remaining funds were used, again with Mandy taking the lead in every case, to secure a special reserve collection of books on moral panics in Brunel University Library; for the development of a website with archive footage of all the keynote presentations from the conference (www.moral-panic.com); and, most significantly, the establishment of an international moral panic studies research network, complete with working paper series and social media feed which, at the time of writing, has a large, international membership, including many major figures from the field.

Amanda was well known on campus, where to support her PhD research she also worked in the library and taught undergraduates. As a very active member of the postgraduate community, she was greatly admired, and came to be known as 'Amanda the Wise'! Exceptionally generous, helpful and friendly, she had an uncanny ability to tackle bureaucracy to get results – 'ask Mandy' seemed the default answer to many queries on campus from students, and increasingly, from colleagues on the academic staff. She was successfully nominated for the Jock McKeon Prize for inspirational leadership – an award she was due to collect formally, together with her PhD, at the graduation ceremony of July 2013. Mandy obtained her PhD with only minor amendments in August of 2012. By this time, she had already developed a publications record that rivalled that of some senior members of academic staff. Alongside articles in prominent sociological journals, numerous book chapters, and a number of international conference presentations, she had already co-edited a special issue of the journal *Crime, Media and Culture*, and had co-edited a book on moral panics entitled *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World*, which is to be published by Bloomsbury Academic in 2013. She had numerous other projects in development. The list of her achievements goes on: it includes the establishment of a BSA study group on moral panics, and

the active involvement in another on alcohol research; a book contract with the prestigious academic publisher Routledge; and most recently, her full-time appointment as a Postgraduate Research Fellow in Sociology at Brunel University funded by the Wellcome Trust.

To those who were fortunate enough to have known her, Mandy was a deeply thoughtful, giving, passionate and inspirational figure. She had a broad range of personal interests, a good number of which centred on her attraction to all things gourmet. This including foraging for wild mushrooms, cake making and decorating, and drinking fine wines and whiskeys. Mandy never quite recovered from her first taste of coffee in the UK. She could scarcely believe that we Brits could tolerate the 'appalling stuff' that was served up to us in all but the highest-end café! Her death comes as a great shock: a huge, gaping loss to us both personally and professionally. It is all the more poignant given that she was just at the start of what was sure to be an absolutely stellar academic career. However, she came to the UK to live the academic life, and that she did with tremendous gusto and flair. She succeeded in realising her principal aim of obtaining a PhD, and, in the process of doing so, achieved so very much more. She cast her personal and intellectual net far and wide. She will be terribly and painfully missed by so many – family, friends and colleagues alike.

Jason Hughes
Brunel University, London, UK
Mandy's PhD supervisor, colleague and friend.

■ CONTRIBUTIONS TO FIGURATIONS

The next issue of *Figurations* will be mailed in July 2013. News and notes should be sent by 1 May 2013 to the Editors at figurations@norberteliasfoundation.nl.

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