

Hermann Korte

# On Norbert Elias— Becoming a Human Scientist

Edited by Stefanie Ernst



Springer VS

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Translated by Stefanie Affeldt



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Hermann Korte  
Münster, Germany

Translation from the German language edition: Über Norbert Elias,  
3. Auflage, by Hermann Korte

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ISBN 978-3-658-17351-7      ISBN 978-3-658-17352-4 (eBook)  
DOI 10.1007/978-3-658-17352-4

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017934642

Springer VS  
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Satz: text plus form, Dresden  
Lektorat: Cori A. Mackrodt

Printed on acid-free paper

This Springer VS imprint is published by Springer Nature  
The registered company is Springer Fachmedien Wiesbaden GmbH  
The registered company address is: Abraham-Lincoln-Str. 46, 65189 Wiesbaden, Germany

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# Editor's Preface

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*Stefanie Ernst*

This first English edition of “On Norbert Elias” is a translation of the third, recently adapted edition in German. The German book was written and published in the 1980s by Suhrkamp/Frankfurt. Whilst Elias was still alive at that time and hesitated to agree to a biography planned by Hermann Korte as well as by Stephen Mennell (Ernst 2015)<sup>1</sup>, now, 25 years later, the third edition in German was published. This long temporal distance has led to new insights about Norbert Elias, especially in terms of his early youth, for example as a member of the Wanderbund (Hiking League) “Blau Weiß” in Heidelberg etc.

This English edition aims to transfer Hermann Korte's research results to an English speaking audience, too. Whereas for the 1970s one could identify a hesitating reception of process-theoretical thinking, there has been a growing audience

1 Ernst, Stefanie. *The 'Formation of the Figurational Family': Generational Chains of Process-Sociological Thinking in Europe*. In: CAMBIO: Rivista sulle trasformazioni sociali 05, 2015, No. 09: 65–78. doi: 10.1400/234057.

in the last roughly 20 years. Meanwhile, Elias's book "The Process of Civilisation" has become a bestseller of Sociology.

This process of intensified reception has been supported by Johan Goudsblom, Eric Dunning, Stephen Mennell and Hermann Korte. Many other colleagues of the first generation of 'Elias-Scholars' have also to be mentioned (Ernst 2015). As an assistant of Dieter Claessens, Korte helped to organise Elias' first guest professorship in Germany, i.e. in Münster. Korte is, therefore, a member of the generation of elder 'Elias-Scholars', who not only knew him personally but also taught his theory as a professor of Sociology and helped Elias in his late career to become one of the best-known classical sociologists in the world.

Korte, in Eliasian terms, stands in a chain of the generations and is an important figure for the next generation of sociologists, as, for example, also for me.

I got to know Elias' 'process-book' in 1990, the year of Elias's death, in a sociological course about "Theories of Modernization", taught by Georg Weber and Armin Nassehi in Münster. In the following years, Nassehi supervised not only my Master thesis about 'Marriage in the Civilising Process'. He moreover encouraged and supported me to publish this work in a book at Westdeutscher Verlag in 1996. During that time, I met Hermann Korte as I was looking for an opportunity to intensify my studies on process-theory. Then Münster was predominated by systems theory or critical sociology, and as PhD candidate, my 'figurational capital' was too weak. Therefore, Hermann Korte invited me to visit him at Bochum, where he had a network of PhD students and 'Habilitanden', for example Annette Treibel and Gabriele Klein. I became his PhD student and found a suitable possi-



bility to study “Gender relations and leadership” (1998)<sup>2</sup> using Elias’ model of the ‘Established and Outsiders’. Korte introduced me to the figurational family, too, when the ISA congress took place in Bielefeld in July 1994. Thus, he was my personal chain to find access to Elias work, to process-theoretical research and the figurational network, too.

Therefore, with this book I also want to use the good opportunity to revitalise and continue the early connection of Elias with Münster, as an editor and via my institutional background that I continuously establish since by comeback in 2012 at the Institute of Sociology in Münster. In this context in 2016, we organized a conference in Münster about “Changing Power Relations and the Drag Effects of Habitus. Theoretical and Empirical Approaches in the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, expected to be published in 2017, and we held a series of lectures in memory of Elias’s Guest professorship in Münster in 1965 about “Gesellschaftspraxis und individuelle Praxis” (Social Processes and Individual Practice) which will be published at VS in spring 2017.

This book would never have been published without the help of others: therefore, I would, like to thank Elke Korte for her help and support to realise this project, Stefanie Affeldt for her great work of translating the book into English in painstaking detail in what amounts to detective work. Several translations and narrated editions in the English publication of Elias’s “Collected Works” at UCD, differed from the format of the German original texts, esp. concerning the

2 An English short version has been published in the *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 10, Nr.3/2003: 277–299 under the title ‘From Blame Gossip to Praise Gossip? Gender, Leadership and Organizational Change’.

footnotes. Here, Behrouz Alikhani gave me great assistance in finding the several texts.

Moreover, with this edition on the occasion of his eightieth birthday I want to thank Hermann Korte, too, as my former supervisor and mentor, who became an important colleague and friend.

Münster

January 2017

# On Norbert Elias

## Becoming a Human Scientist

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### Prologue

**T**he German version of this book was written in the mid-1980s. I had, at that time, already—and with increasing intensity—dealt with the works of Norbert Elias for a good twenty years. Over the years, I was also able to help him with some everyday items and accompany him on his journeys. This found formal expression in my appointment to the board of the Norbert Elias Stichting Amsterdam, which he had established in 1983. He had contributed his literary rights as capital, of which I have since been in charge, in coordination with my two board colleagues Johan Goudsblom (Amsterdam) and Stephen Menell (Dublin), together with the literary agency Liepman (Zurich).

This also means that Norbert Elias was still alive when I was working on the text. He was not particularly taken with my plan, as well as with similar plans by Stephen Menell. After several long conversations, he finally tolerated, albeit not endorsed, the project. It was not an easy time for any of us.

Now, thirty years later, the publisher Springer VS has

provided me with the opportunity to submit a revised and translated edition. While doing so, I have refrained from making the inept attempt to rewrite the book. Also, this was not necessary because the text of this biographical report on the whole continues to have substance until today. In my revision, I have focussed on editing only a few points.

Firstly, Elias is no longer alive; he died on 1 August 1990. For the second edition in 1997, I had not yet changed the corresponding sections of the text. He was still too much present as a person to me. Now I have taken this into account—even if Norbert Elias has persisted in his writings, in the memories of his friends—in the same way as he phrased it in the conclusion of his, in my eyes, most beautiful text “The Loneliness of Dying”: “Death hides no secret. It opens no door. It is the end of a person. What survives is what he or she has given to other people, what stays in their memory”.<sup>1</sup>

The memory remains alive, not least because the work on and with his opus continuously progresses, and one or the other new fact is being added to his biography. This is also due to the fact that research about individual persons, and the traces they have left, is much faster and more fruitful in the era of the internet. I will make a few comments on this.

1 Norbert Elias: *The Loneliness of Dying*. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 6, *The Loneliness of Dying and Humana Conditio*, UCD 2010, p. 52. Norbert Elias's quotes have been taken from *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, resp. ed. by Eric R. Baker, Artur Bogner, Edmund Jephcott, Marc Joly, Katie Liston, Eric Dunning, Johan Goudsblom, Richard Kilminster, Robert van Krieken, Steven Loyal, Stephen Mennell, René Moelker, Stephen Quilley, Alan and Brigitte Scott, and Cas Wouters, University College Dublin Press 2006–2014. Unless indicated otherwise, all quotes from German sources have been translated by the translator.

But first I have to mention a controversy that has already started during Elias's lifetime, shortly after the completion of my text in 1987—a controversy that has now also become history as the Elias-Duerr debate. In 1987 I had read the preprint of a chapter from Hans Peter Duerr's first book "Nacktheit und Scham. Der Mythos im Zivilisationsprozeß"<sup>2</sup> and could not imagine that an extensive, public debate would arise from Duerr's arguments. That this nonetheless happened was less related to the theoretical brilliance of the book but rather with the fact that though the attack against the process of civilization was focussed on Elias, it was in principle aimed at all process-oriented sociology and likewise concerned, for instance, Max Weber, Max Horkheimer or Jürgen Habermas. It was in particular the conservative print media, like the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* which again and again presented Duerr's propositions, above all his assumptions about biological and anthropological constants. His propositions fitted in nicely with the late 1980s in the federal republic and the then current discussions on the universal values of society. Duerr hardly found any support in the social sciences for his theses. Michael Schröter<sup>3</sup> and Michael Hinz<sup>4</sup> have exemplarily presented their analysis of

- 2 Hans Peter Duerr: *Nacktheit und Scham. Der Mythos vom Zivilisationsprozeß*. Vol. 1, Frankfurt/M. 1988. This was followed by four more volumes on the "Mythos of the Zivilisationsprozeß".
- 3 Michael Schröter: *Scham im Zivilisationsprozeß. Zur Diskussion mit Hans Peter Duerr*. In: Hermann Korte (ed.): *Gesellschaftliche Prozesse und individuelle Praxis. Bochumer Vorlesungen zu Norbert Elias' Zivilisationstheorie*, Frankfurt/M. 1990, pp. 42–85.
- 4 Michael Hinz: *Der Zivilisationsprozeß: Mythos oder Realität? Wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Elias-Duerr Kontroverse*. Opladen 2002.

Duerr's theses and have shown that no serious argument can be won with them against process-theoretically oriented sociology.

Now, as far as the biography is concerned, it is in particular the sources made accessible after his death on his membership in the Jewish Wanderbund "Blau-Weiß" (hiking club) that shed a new light on his autobiographical statements concerning the time in Breslau (today: Wrocław). He had only once commented on his time in the Jewish Jugendbund (youth association): "I had an enormous admiration for the German landscape. Even much later, in my early twenties, I had a very intimate knowledge of all the cathedrals—Bamberg, for example. I knew all the buildings by heart, all the styles. And actually there was a Jewish youth movement that was completely oriented towards these German things".<sup>5</sup>

Even though his membership in "Blau-Weiß" was known when he was still alive, he had never given any further written information on this issue, had trivialized its meaning in conversations or completely denied it. In my biographical fragment "Norbert Elias in Breslau"<sup>6</sup>, I had assumed that he had joined the hiking club under the impression of and only after the First World War. I had to correct this mistake, in the same vein as Elias had to abandon his reserved depiction of his time in "Blau-Weiß".

5 Cited from the Interview with Arend-Jan Heerma van Voss and Bram van Stolk 1984. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 17, *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections*, Norbert Elias's story of life (1984), UCD 2013, pp. 71–140 (here: p. 86).

6 Hermann Korte: *Norbert Elias in Breslau. Ein biografisches Fragment*. In: *Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, Vol. 20, Issue 1, February 1991, pp. 3–11.

This was because in 1994 the historian Jörg Hackeschmidt reported findings from the *Central Zionists Archive* in Jerusalem. He was preparing a study on the “Zionist Organizations” in Germany and, during his research, came across the estate of Martin Bandmann from Breslau, a “leading thinker of the Jewish youth association”.<sup>7</sup> Also included in the estate was a diary which Bandmann had kept between 1919 and 1925. In this diary his friend Norbert Elias is mentioned almost every day. And the very same Elias had been a member of “Weiß-Blau” even before the First World War, at a time when he was still a high school student, and, after 1919, had become one of its ideological spokesmen. For this reason I have adopted some of the data during the revision of this text. As far as the whole complex is concerned, I have addressed this issue in another essay which I published in 2013, with six other texts from the last twenty years.<sup>8</sup>

At the beginning of the 1990s, Jörg Hackeschmidt had to work on-site in the archives of Jerusalem. This was the then common practice for gaining access to sources. Nowadays, in the era of the internet, many of the relevant sources are digitalized. This provides several advantages, but it also means that archival work with and on the material is lost along the way—and with that, probably, also valuable insight. However, the global availability of personal data and publications greatly supports understanding the personal environment of a person.

7 Jörg Hackeschmidt: *Von Kurt Blumenfeld zu Norbert Elias. Die Erfindung einer jüdischen Nation*. Hamburg 1997, p. 17.

8 Hermann Korte: *Elias und der jüdische Wanderbund “Blauweiß”*, in: *Biographische Skizzen zu Norbert Elias*, Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 75–84.

In the recent past, the Marburg historian Adrian Jitschin has made a couple of new discoveries regarding the Elias family which might not have been possible without internet research. From the family tree with several so far unknown relations to the various places of Norbert Elias's residence: with his work, Jitschin enriched the knowledge on the biographical circumstance. I have drawn upon it and acknowledged this accordingly and hope that he will soon publish his findings.<sup>9</sup>

A further difference to the time when I was finishing the book needs to be addressed. Since 2007 eighteen volumes of Norbert Elias's 'Gesammelte Schriften', including a collective index, were published by Suhrkamp (for details see the bibliography). In this revision, I have taken most of my English quotations from the corresponding reference in the 'Collected Works of Norbert Elias', for those that have not yet been translated I refer to the 'Gesammelte Schriften'.

I have to thank Elke Korte for the critical review of the new manuscript and, in the editorial office, Cori Antonia Mackrodt for her informed support.

9 Published in Issue 39 of the Norbert Elias Stichting's biannual newsletter in summer 2013 (For details, refer to the bulletin at the end of the bibliography).



# First Chapter A Long Life Has its Advantages—or: The Late Career of a Book

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In the summer of 1939 Thomas Mann and his wife Katja spent a couple of vacation weeks in the Dutch seaside resort Nordwijk. They resided in the Huis ter Duin. Amongst the letters that arrived on 26 July was a book parcel. Thomas Mann noted in his diary: “Über den Prozeß der Civilisation by N. Elias arrived”. On 31 July, he thanked the author: “Wrote to Dr Elias, London, about his history of civilisation”. But he also reads in the book, makes corresponding entries in his diary (17 July and 5 August) and acknowledges: “The book by Elias is more valuable than I thought, in particular the images from the late Middle Ages and the late age of chivalry”.<sup>1</sup>

These short notes, a two-part review in a professional journal, three reviews in the Swiss press media—two in the Basel *Nationalzeitung* as well as one in the *Schweizer*

1 Thomas Mann: Tagebücher 1937–1939. Ed. by Peter de Mendelssohn. Frankfurt/M. 1980, pp. 440 ff.

*Monatsheften*<sup>2</sup>—would for a long time remain the only German reactions to the 836-page book, which Norbert Elias published in two volumes under the title “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen” with the Basel publisher *Haus zum Falken* in 1939. The first volume was titled “Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes”, the second “Wandlungen der Gesellschaft, Entwurf einer Theorie der Zivilisation”.<sup>3</sup>

The publisher *Haus zum Falken* was founded by Dr Fritz Karger in 1936, in close relation to the publisher S. Karger who had been exiled as non-Aryan from Berlin in 1933. The publisher set themselves to publish German-speaking studies which otherwise would not be made public in the German Reich. Norbert Elias’s book was such a case.

- 2 P.A.S.: Review for “Norbert Elias: Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Bd. 1 Basel 1939”. In: *Baseler Nationalzeitung*, 24/25 June 1939 and 4/5 November 1939; Eugen Curti: Review on “Norbert Elias: Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation, Bd. 1 und 2. Basel 1939”. In: *Schweizer Monatshefte* XXII (1942), pp. 74–75.
- 3 The title of the translation is ‘On the Process of Civilisation. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations’ and the two books are titled ‘Changes in the Behaviour of the Secular Upper Classes in the West’ and ‘State Formation and Civilisation’ respectively and were published as Volume 3 of *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias* by the University College Dublin Press.

## Pre-Print and the First Printing of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” (1937/1939)

In 1937 Elias had the first volume privately printed by C. Schulze & Co. GmbH in Gräfenhainichen, a small town halfway between Bitterfeld and Wittenberg. Attached to the individual copies was a note bearing the following announcement: “This work will be published by *Academia Prag*. These copies marked as preprints are not intended for trade”. Due to them being good friends, Franz Borckenau and S.H. Foulkes—on whose reviews I will further elaborate at a later time—had received such copies from the first printing process. Elias, through the mediation of Gisèle Freund, had also sent one copy to Walter Benjamin in April 1938. This, however, did not result in a review in the journal of the Institute for Social Research, as we will see in the last chapter.

After the occupation of Czechoslovakia by the Third Reich, the plans to publish the book with the Prague publishing house were no longer feasible. While looking for another publisher, Elias encountered Fritz Karger and offered him the already manufactured print sheets.

When, in 1938, Fritz Karger learned about the book, he was convinced that its content was important and publication would be both necessary and desirable. In consultation with the German print house, he had “another few hundred” printed with the information of his own publishing house. But subsequently he had to blacken with Chinese ink the information ‘Printed in Germany’ in all copies in order to refrain from giving the “interested parties in the free world” the idea that “they would support the Nazis with the purchase of the book printed in Germany (after all, they could

NORBERT ELIAS

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ÜBER DEN PROZESS DER  
ZIVILISATION

SOZIOGENETISCHE UND  
PSYCHOGENETISCHE UNTERSUCHUNGEN

«La civilisation ... n'est pas encore terminée.»  
(Hobbes, *Système Social*, 1776)

ERSTER BAND

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VORABDRUCK 1937

Figure 1 Cover page of the pre-print of 1937

not know that no currency had been paid to Germany for this book)”.<sup>4</sup>

I was able to obtain an uncut copy of the second volume that was without blackening in 1964. This may have been due to the fact that, in early 1939, the German printer initially delivered the first volume only, which was then sold separately. It was not until the summer of 1939, shortly before the beginning of the war, that Fritz Karger received copies of the second volume.

After the outbreak of the Second World War, the sales possibility declined even more. The people had other things to worry about. Bit by bit the postal connections were interrupted. Newspapers which, under normal circumstances, would perhaps have published reviews were not able to appear due to the increasing occupation of the neighbouring countries by the German Wehrmacht. In England, too, scientific journals were temporarily discontinued because of a lack of personnel, money and interest.

## **The Process of Monopolization: On the Review by Franz Borkenau**

Thus, for example, *The Sociological Review*, in which Frank Borkenau published his two-part review of the Civilization book, was temporarily discontinued at the end of 1941 and followed the destiny of all short-lived journals:

4 Fritz Karger: Fata Libelli. In Peter Gleichmann, Johann Goudsblom, Herman Korte (eds.): *Human Figurations. Essays for/Aufsätze für Norbert Elias*. Amsterdam 1977, pp. 23–24 (here: p. 23). In the following, this volume will be referenced as ‘Human Figurations’.

they fall into oblivion because they become valueless for reputation and careers. The review of the first part had already appeared in July 1938, that of the second part in October 1939.<sup>5</sup>

For this Borkenau had used a copy of the preprint and indicated “*Schulze, Germany 1937*” as the first volume’s publisher. He was a good acquaintance of Elias’s, dating from his time in Frankfurt. He was a member of the Institut für Sozialforschung, in whose buildings Elias worked as an assistant to Karl Mannheim. It is probable that the relations tied back much further, to the years in Heidelberg. Borkenau was a companion of Richard Löwenthal, who had followed him as chairman of the Kommunistischen Studenten-Fraktion (Communist Student Fraction). Both left the Communist Party at the same time in 1929 and thus also quit the Communist Student Fraction, since it only accepted registered members of the Communist Party. Richard Löwenthal was, at this time, part of an informal circle of friends “whose centre point was Elias”.<sup>6</sup> After being sent into exile, in 1934, Borkenau went to London, where Elias would be living from the autumn 1935 onwards, too. Both later became lecturers in the Department for Adult Education of the University of London. His reviews were certainly a token of friendship, but not only that. The Elias book must have been of interest to him, not least because he had already worked on the question of how, in the course of centuries, certain monopo-

5 Franz Borkenau: Review for “Norbert Elias: Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation, Bd. 1 u. 2. Basel 1939”. In: *Sociological Review* XXX (1938), pp. 308–311 and XXI (1939), pp. 450–452.

6 Richard Löwenthal provided this information in an authorised radio interview conducted by Reinhard Blomert on 4 June 1986.

lies of power had emerged. Elias demonstrated in his book, how, during the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> century, France had still been divided into numerous small sovereign territories whose rulers were involved in constant military conflicts. Starting in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, a numerically decreasing group of noble families accomplished to gain control over larger and larger territories. Over the course of time, this control could be applied effectively because, little by little, two monopolies fell into the hands of the rulers: the power and tax-monopoly. For Elias, monopolization is a process which takes initially place within individual regions and subsequently amongst regional rulers. The mechanism of monopoly, one of the central aspects of the civilization process, results in an amplifying dependency on an ever increasing number of people. This had two important consequences: there were changes, firstly, in the regulation of the sexual instinct and the emotional life and, secondly, in the interpersonal balances of power.

In his book “Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild”,<sup>7</sup> Borkenau correlated the ways of thinking in the 17<sup>th</sup> century with the emergence of manufacture which, according to him, had a model-like role in the development of new perceptions of nature and society. Back then, Borkenau was still following a Marxist-Leninist conception of history and connected the emergence of new ways of thinking with class struggle. The conversions of societal existence explained the transformations of knowledge—a

7 Franz Borkenau: *Der Übergang vom feudalen zum bürgerlichen Weltbild. Studien zur Geschichte der Philosophie der Manufakturperiode*, Paris 1934.

point of view not shared by Elias, due to the monocausal orientation in its explanatory structure.

These similarities that were identified in the starting point of both books, are, however, not found in their content. Elias's approach is, as we will see later on, definitely not to be assigned to the historical-materialist school. On the contrary: topic and thesis are reciprocal entanglements of different spheres of life. It is therefore not surprising that Borkenau's review of the first volume was enthusiastic: "In this remarkable analysis precise historical examination and generalizing theoretical interpretation are connected in an almost unique manner, reminding of Max Weber's best tradition and his school ... No student of sociology interested in the threshold between individual psychology and social structures can afford to miss out on this book".<sup>8</sup> Regarding the second volume, he had problems and objections, in particular pertaining to the significance of monopoly of power for the formation of the superego. Even if, at that time, Borkenau had already been in the process of turning away from Marxism, in arguing in this manner he probably had in mind his own work.

8 Translation quoted after Johann Goudsblom: *Aufnahme und Kritik der Arbeiten von Norbert Elias in England, Deutschland, den Niederlanden und Frankreich*. In: Peter Gleichmann, Johan Goudsblom, Hermann Korte (eds.): *Materialien zu Norbert Elias' Zivilisationstheorie*, Frankfurt/Main 1979, pp. 17–100 (here: pp. 22 f.). In the following, this anthology serves as a material volume and will be referenced as "Materialband I".



## Sociogenesis and Psychogenesis: On the Review by S.H. Foulkes

A second early review was written by an acquaintance from Elias's Frankfurt days. S.H. Foulkes published his reviews of the first and the second volume of the Civilization book in the *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* in 1939 and 1941 respectively.<sup>9</sup> Foulkes, too, drew on the preprint for his review of the first volume, but he cited as the place and date of publication "*Academia Verlag, Prag, Vorabdruck, 1937*". When writing, he assumed that the announced Prague edition would be issued. This information had, for a long time, caused some confusion. Since the process of the preprint with the added announcement was unknown or uncertain, it was assumed, based on the information given in Foulkes's review, that the book had actually been published in Prague.

Foulkes worked as a psychoanalytic in London and had, after being sent into exile, changed his name. In Frankfurt he was called Fuchs and taught at the Psychoanalytical Institute, which, like the Institute for Sociology, was housed in the buildings of the Institute for Social Research. In his autobiographical notes regarding his time in Frankfurt he mentioned by name Elias from whom he had learned a lot. The Psychoanalytical Institute was directed by two students of Freud, Karl Landauer and Heinrich Meng. Furthermore, there existed links to Heidelberg, which suggested that it

9 Siegmund H. Foulkes: Rezension zu Norbert Elias: "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation, Bd. 1 und 2. Basel 1939". In: *Internationale Zeitschrift für Psychoanalyse* XXIV (1939), pp. 179–181 and XXVI (1941), pp. 316–319.

was already here where Elias had become interested in the works of Freud. The teaching staff of the Psychoanalytical Institute also included Erich Fromm and Frieda Reichmann, the latter was an analyst and later became the wife of the former. Both had lived in Heidelberg.

Who actually analysed Elias in the 1940s is not known. What is certain, however, is the fact of the analysis. In autobiographical interviews, Elias talks about his analyst without mentioning whether it was a man or a woman. In any case, he participated in some therapeutic groups during this time. At a later time, in 1969, he wrote a contribution titled “Sociology and Psychiatry” for the anthology “Psychiatry in a Changing Society” which was edited by Foulkes.<sup>10</sup>

The two-part review published by Foulkes was in a sense similar to the one by Borkeuau. Foulkes, too, attributes particular importance to the book and would like to make “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” a standard reference for psychoanalysts. He praises, above all, the first volume, in which Elias develops his sociogenetic approach, while he is more reticent on the second volume.

Based on his conviction that the sociological concepts should be aimed at people and the changing relations among them, in many examples Elias shows, in particular in the first volume, that there is a connection between the relations of people and their individual behaviour. Not only do the social circumstances change, but also the emotional household and the consciousness of the involved, interlinked persons changed as a whole. Modern societies and economic

10 Norbert Elias: Sociology and Psychiatry. In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 16, Essays III. On Sociology and the Humanities, UCD 2009, pp. 159–179.

monopolies required another form of affect regulation; they are reciprocal without establishing or perpetuating this particular form of psychological households. The skilled industrial worker differs from the courtier of the absolutistic court not only socioeconomically but also psychologically and emotionally; both, in turn, are different from the warrior of the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Sociogenesis and psychogenesis belong together, are related to one another, closely interwoven.

Foulkes mentions neither the process theory of state development and formation nor Elias's discussion of the mechanism of monopolies. Apart from him being mainly interested in those statements which provided a better understanding of individual personality development, the ground was not yet prepared for a perspective of which Elias was convinced it would enable a better understanding of the processes of state formation.

## **Culture and Civilization: On the Review of Menno ter Braak**

While the two aforementioned reviews did little for the reception of the book, things are different in the following case of the third review. At the beginning of the 1950s, the Dutch sociologist Johan Goudsblom came across a review by Menno ter Braak written on 27 August 1939,<sup>11</sup> which called the book to his attention. "When I fetched it from the library and started reading, I was immediately captivated.

11 Menno ter Braak: Review for "Norbert Elias: Über den Prozess der Zivilisation, Bd. 1, Basel 1939". In: *Het Vaderland*, 27. 8. 1939.

Finally I had a book lying in front of me which professionally as well as knowledgably dealt with a wide range of significant problems".<sup>12</sup> This was the beginning of an intensive and comprehensive reception of Elias's works in the Netherlands, which, at a time when "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation" was still treated as an insider's tip in West Germany, had almost led to the formation of an academic school.

Menno ter Braak reviewed only the first volume. The review of the second volume was prevented by the outbreak of the Second World War. As a trained historian, ter Braak was concerned, most of all, with Elias's comparison of culture and civilization and emphasized Elias's orientation towards processes.

The first volume does begin with an extensive discussion of the conceptual differences between civilization and culture in France and Germany. For the intelligentsia and the aspiring bourgeoisie in the many German states and principalities of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century—in their powerlessness and their likewise forced as well as wanted distance to the centres of power—culture was the very concept that was applied to counter the refined civilized customs of the small courts. The German courts and kingdoms were not large enough to take their own paths in the development of court etiquette. All of them followed the concept of civilization (Zivilisiertheit) which had emerged at the absolutist French court as 'civilisation' or 'civilité'.

The social reasons for the emergence of a refined etiquette at the French court of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century and the con-

12 Johan Goudsblom: Aufnahme und Kritik der Arbeiten von Norbert Elias, loc. cit., p. 19.

cept of culture's social career in Germany are portrayed and—this is typical for the Eliasian working method—subsequently continued as a line of argument. By generalizing, the transition from social differences to national concepts is pointed out, a process that extends to the present day. Elias is also concerned with the question of how the emergence of modern European states came about and why the different states of the Christian occident have undergone such differing developments.

Menno ter Braak at least knew Elias's name. Both had prepared contributions for the emigrants' journal *Die Sammlung* which Klaus Mann redacted and published at the Querido Verlag in Amsterdam. In 1939 Elias published a short essay on "Kitschstil and Kitschzeitalter" ("The kitsch style and the age of kitsch")<sup>13</sup> there, and Menno ter Braak wrote about it in the Hague daily *Het Vaderland*.<sup>14</sup>

But there was also another possible way how ter Braak's attention could have been drawn to Elias's book. During the time when Thomas Mann stayed in the Huis ter Duin in Nordwijk in the summer of 1939, ter Braak was one of the gladly welcomed conversation partners of his. Gladly welcomed not only because of the laudatory review of "Lotte in Weimar" but, above all, because he held ter Braak in high regard. Mann called ter Braak "a friend who [was] the grace of his life".<sup>15</sup> Mann wrote in his eulogy on ter Braak, who took

13 Norbert Elias: The kitsch style and the age of kitsch (1935). In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, Early Writings, UCD 2005, pp. 85–96.

14 Menno ter Braak: Review for "Norbert Elias: Kitschstil und Kitschzeitalter. In: *Die Sammlung* II (1935), pp. 252–263". In: *Het Vaderland*, 8.1.1935, pp. 148–163.

15 Thomas Mann: *Miszellen*. Frankfurt/Main 1968, p. 229.

his own life upon the German invasion of the Netherlands, that he had been “incorruptible, passionate and vigilant, at home in the past and tenderly turned towards the future”.<sup>16</sup> It stands to reason that both have also talked about the Civilisation book, which Thomas Mann had received in Nordwijk and which he partially read when he was there. Mann had made notes in his personal diary of his encounters with ter Braak during his vacation stay in Holland.<sup>17</sup>

A few more reviews were published after 1939. Worth mentioning is the review which Raymond Aron, one of the great personalities of French sociology, penned in 1941, in the, for the time being, last volume of the *Les Annales Sociologiques*.<sup>18</sup> Aron was very impressed by the originality of the study and the descriptive interrelation of sociogenetic and psychogenetic developments. He also referred to Elias’s inclusion of the changing class relations into his study, a fact that is frequently (and readily) overlooked by recipients to this day.

16 Thomas Mann: In memoriam Menno ter Braak. In: Reden und Aufsätze 2. Oldenburg 1960, pp. 513–515 (here: p. 514).

17 Thomas Mann: Tagebücher 1937–1939, loc. cit., pp. 427 ff.

18 Raymond Aron: Review for “Norbert Elias: Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Bd. 1 und 2. Basel 1939”. In: *Les Annales Sociologiques*, Série A. Volume 4 (1941), pp. 54–56.

## 30 Years of Silence

Aron's review, too, initially disappeared during German occupation. But Raymond Aron did not forget the great book and used his influence when, at the beginning of the 1970s, a French translation was about to be issued. However, just as in France, the book that had until then been showered with laurels sank into oblivion in Europe for the next thirty years.

Along with the book, the author fell from the professional field of view. He lived in exile in London, under rather unpleasant circumstances which I will address later on. It was only in 1954 when he, already 57 years old, got a minor position as a lecturer at the University of Leicester—21 years after he had left the University of Frankfurt as a refugee. Subsequently, it took an additional fifteen years until a Swiss publishing house issued a reprint of the first volume, expanded by a long preface in which Elias made a scathing attack on sociology, on the sociologists and on their career-dominating North American system theory, and pointed out that sociology could have saved themselves this aberration had they taken note of his 1939 book. The new edition was offered at a price of DM 70, which, in 1969, was a prohibitive price that considerably hindered the adequate distribution.

But the moment, too, was relatively inappropriate. Back then, in the social sciences—and not only there—an intensive reception of Marx was the order of the day. Some reviews were thus published in 1969 and 1970;<sup>19</sup> the most

19 See Johan Goudsblom: *Aufnahme und Kritik der Arbeiten von Norbert Elias*, loc. cit., pp. 45 ff.

important of which was that by Wolf Lepenies in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*.<sup>20</sup> However, after this silence prevailed once again and did not end until 1975. At the last weekend of August 1975, the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* published a detailed and knowledgeable review by Christian Graf von Krockow.<sup>21</sup> He indicated the circumstance which led to the book remaining hidden for so long. He also concisely and correctly identified the issues in the reception after 1969. “Only after 1969 a second edition was possible. Doubts are certainly permitted whether this was an opportune moment, since the book was not consistent with either the new Marxist dogmatic or the ahistorical system theory”.

With regard to the review, it is striking that Krockow points out the significance of the civilization theory for the processing, understanding and solving of current problems. He mentions three areas. Firstly, he called to mind that Elias’s examinations of the Königsmechanismus (royal mechanism), with its balance between the several social forces, also shed a “bright light on problems discussed today regarding the question whether Western democracies are ‘governable’ at all or whether they are becoming increasingly ungovernable”. The second point concerned the developmental problems in the Third World, where the problem of the modification of the closely interrelated psychic and social structures was particularly complex. One could learn a lot about these mechanisms from Elias. And, thirdly, the

20 Wolf Lepenies: Review for “Norbert Elias: Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 5. 11. 1969.

21 Christian Graf von Krockow: “Norbert Elias: Über den Prozess der Zivilisation. Bd. 1 und 2. München, Bern (2) 1969”. In: *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 30./31. 8. 1975.



emergence of power monopolies with their external and internal disciplining had to be considered, when, in the spirit of the progressing democratization of the 1970s, the liberality of a more open system was postulated in opposition to the authoritarian state. Individual and society are not separated entities, and “thus self-control and democratization form interrelated and essential components of the long-term, never to be completed but always endangered, process of civilization”.

## The Rediscovery

Gradually, the social sciences, in the broadest sense, became aware of “Prozeß der Zivilisation”. The actual breakthrough, however, did not occur until 1976, when a paperback edition of the two volumes was issued by the *Suhrkamp Verlag*. The editor of the series *suhrkamp taschenbücher wissenschaft*, Friedrich Herborth, had argued in favour of an inclusion in the series, and the publisher Siegfried Unseld had agreed. Beforehand, Elias had to buy the rights for the paperback from the successor of the publisher *Haus zum Falken*, the Bernese publishing house *Francke*. The publisher at the Swiss publishing house did not believe in the chance to distribute the book as a paperback und wanted to sell first of all the expensive clothbound copies.

After this prehistory, success hardly seemed feasible. But the author was—still was, one has to say—convinced of the accuracy *and* the relevance of this book and was certain that the book would eventually attract due attention. In 1976 Fritz Karger wrote in a contribution to the commemorative

publication in celebration of Elias's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday that he was pleased to see the book was now attracting some attention. He closed with the statement: "Even if it (the book, H.K.) will not become a 'bestseller', it can nonetheless become a 'long seller'".<sup>22</sup>

This was a misjudgement. *Suhrkamp* sold about 20 000 copies in the first year—an exceptional success for a scientific, even more for a sociological, book. *Suhrkamp* became Elias's personal publishing house. After Friedhelm Herboth, Siegfried Unseld, too, took on the case with great dedication. Since 1977, *Suhrkamp* also published numerous studies done by friends and pupils of Elias. Furthermore, the material volumes I and II were published by the *Suhrkamp Verlag*.

It was correct of Krockow to add the subtitle in his review of "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation": "On a body of work by Norbert Elias"; because by then "Die höfische Gesellschaft" ('The Court Society', 1969) and "Was ist Soziologie?" (1970, and the English edition: *What is Sociology?*, 1978) had already been published by *Luchterhand* and the *Juventa-Verlag* respectively. "Die höfische Gesellschaft" was a revised and expanded text of the postdoctoral thesis submitted by Elias in February 1933. When he was forced to flee the country, the habilitation procedure had practically been finished, with the exception of the public colloquium, but could eventually not be completed. The text was supplemented in 1969 with additives that had subsequently arisen and with a long preface on "Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft" ('Sociology and Historiography') in which Elias

22 Fritz Karger: *Fata Libelli*, loc. cit., p. 24.

made very clear the differences between his sociology—an investigation focussed on long-term processes—and the established historiography.<sup>23</sup>

## Sociology and History

At the end of the preface for “Sociology and Historiography”, Elias summarised three points. Firstly, historical investigations suffered from the heteronomy of their valuations. The historians’ personal scale of values and their ideals too often gained the upper hand over what would have been important in the respective examined period. Sociological investigations, in turn, demanded a “stricter curbing of the personal feelings and ideals of the researcher or, in other words, a greater autonomy of valuations”.<sup>24</sup>

In the second point, Elias criticized that history was focused too much on individual persons. This is not only wrong with regard to methodology but also the expression of an ideology that is based on the perception of people’s uniqueness and individuality. The alleged dichotomy of freedom and determinism was meant to be avoided in favour of freedom. This was incidentally a position that was also covertly supported by the system theory, whose most prominent representative was Talcott Parsons. Sociological investigations, like that on the “courtly society” in the 17<sup>th</sup> century showed a relative autonomy *and* a relative dependence of

23 Norbert Elias: Sociology and Historiography. In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 2, The Court Society, UCD 2002, pp. 3–38.

24 Loc. cit., p. 31.

the humans who were portrayed in figuration models. “It is only with the aid of such models that we can examine and, to an extent, explain the scope for decision of an individual within the chain of dependences, the sphere of his autonomy and the strategy governing his behaviour”.<sup>25</sup>

Lastly, the third point, which is closely related to the first two points, refers to history’s deficit in theory: “The store of certain knowledge of historical detail is growing, but the growth in certain knowledge of connections between details is not keeping pace”.<sup>26</sup> The lack of a “sure basis for representing historical connections” led to interpretations which were determined “by the short-lived values and ideals of the historians”. Complementary to the changing of these ideals, history is “constantly being rewritten”<sup>27</sup> again and again.

While in particular younger historians, who had by then begun to break loose from a historiography that was focussed on individual persons, agreed with Elias or referred to him charging already open doors, responses from sociologists remained limited. As already mentioned, the latter were still occupied with the reception of Marx. A similar fate was experienced by the book “Was ist Soziologie?”, published in 1970 with a few years delay. What the reception would have been like, had the book been published as had been planned and announced in 1967, cannot be determined in retrospect.

25 Loc. cit, p. 37.

26 Loc. cit., p. 37

27 Loc. cit., p. 37.

## What is Sociology?

**W**as ist Soziologie?" was published as volume I of the series "Grundfragen der Soziologie", comprising, firstly, translated North American titles of a successful introductory series and, secondly, original contributions by German authors. Dieter Claessens, who was the editor of the series, was won over as an author rather coincidentally by Elias. A translation of Inkeles' "What is Sociology?" has initially been intended as volume I. When, in 1965, Elias came to Münster as a guest professor at the invitation of Claessens, the latter informed him of his plans. (I was standing close by as a student assistant assigned to the guest). Claessens gave Elias the recently arrived book by Inkeles for information. Elias's comment was unambiguous: "What is Sociology?' This is an important question, but, Mr Claessens, you may rest assured that Mr Inkeles does not know the answer!" As a result, Claessens convinced Elias to assume responsibility of the first volume. The latter guaranteed his commitment, which, after five years, he finally lived up to. By then, the other fifteen volumes of the series had already been published.

In "What is Sociology?" Elias illustrated that sociology, in contrast to the physical-chemical, biological sciences, is a relatively autonomous discipline. The development, the structures and the functionalities of the society humans formed together still had to be understood. This was a learning programme yet to be completed. Already at that time Elias rejected the notions by a unified science to devise a methodology which would be consistent in all sciences. "Attempts to establish a particular method as the decisive crite-

tion of science do not reach the heart of the matter ... Systematic observation as a means of gaining knowledge only becomes meaningful if people have already developed an idea of a field of subject matter that allows them to understand the value of systematic observations for the purpose of exploring it”.<sup>28</sup>

The envisaged relative autonomy of a science is bound to three preconditions: firstly, a “relative autonomy of the subject matter of one science with respect to the subject matter of the other sciences”, secondly, a relative independence of the “scientific theory about this subject matter”; and, thirdly, it necessitates the relative autonomy within the institutional structure of academic teaching and research.<sup>29</sup> Elias vividly portrays the difficulty to, little by little, obtain this relative autonomy by tracing the beginnings of sociology to Auguste Comte—whose principal merit is, for Elias, “the replacement of the individual person by human society as the ‘subject’ of knowledge”.<sup>30</sup> But it is becoming clear that there are difficulties for both sociology and the sociologist in understanding clear, long-term developments regarding their own destiny and, at the same time, in drawing conclusions for life in the society under investigation.

The preface to the second edition of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”, “Die höfische Gesellschaft” with the preface for “Soziologie und Geschichtswissenschaft” and the introductory book “Was ist Soziologie?” clarify positions which

28 Norbert Elias: What is Sociology? In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 5, UCD 2012, p. 53 f.

29 Norbert Elias: What is Sociology?, loc. cit., p. 55.

30 Loc. cit., p. 33.

had already been laid out in the first edition of the Civilization book and whose initial approaches—as we will see—date back even further, to the student days of the 1920s. In the, rather narrative, text dating from 1939, these approaches have not been made overly explicit but remain coded. Only the connoisseur of the sociological expert discussion—like those conducted by sociologists in the 1920s and the beginning of the 1930s—are able to understand this from the text. It also lacks the extensive body of annotations that is taken for granted in ‘normal’ scientific publications. This holds also true, though to a lesser extent, for “Die höfische Gesellschaft” and “Was ist Soziologie?”. But in these publications, and in the preface to the second edition, Elias explicit states which topics, questions and problems of general sociology he considers interesting. However, this work programme was “of course implicitly present in the two volumes of 1939”, as Wolf Lepenies correctly noticed in his review of 25 November 1969.

In the meantime, Elias had—through a number of book publications and essays—determinedly intervened in the debates led amongst sociologists on the possibilities and conditions of sociology. But one would be amiss here, too, if one got the impression that this was a recent evolution in his case—or that these topics were new to sociology. The question whether and how much sociology constitutes a relatively autonomous science, whether its objects are abstract, ahistorical models of thought or social processes, and what kind of responsibilities sociologists have to face within the society to which they belonged—all these question can already be found in the first great study of 1939 as well as in the Elias’s early investigations and statements from the

1920s. Moreover, it is not the case that Elias had only determinedly commented on this in the German publications of the late 1960s. There are several English essays and a book in which he had already further developed his concepts and explained several of the key points. In the following, I will briefly introduce three of them.

## The Genesis of a Profession

In 1950, after a long time of silence, Elias published an essay in *The British Journal of Sociology* dealing with the genesis of the naval officer's profession.<sup>31</sup> It was an attempt to apply the interdependence of sociogenesis and psychogenesis—which developed and presented in particular for Germany and France in “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”—to the development of the English society, based exemplarily on the emergence of a certain profession. The parallels are unequivocal. Not individuals make history, here professions: “It is the changing situation of a whole community which created the conditions for the rise of a new occupation and determines its course of development”.<sup>32</sup> Also, in the first part of the essay there is no lack of statements on the advantages of sociological long-term studies compared with traditional historiography. The study was meant to be published in three parts. At least it had been thus announced in the annotations of the first part. Unfortunately

31 Norbert Elias: Studies in the Genesis of the Naval Profession. In: BJS I (1950), pp. 291–309.

32 Loc. cit., p. 291.



only this first part was then published. It deals with social groups from which the future ship's officers as professional groups were recruited. The second part, meant to deal with societal tensions amongst groups, and the third, meant to provide a comparison between the developments in France and England, have not been completed. The Dutch military historian René Mølker and Stephen Mennell from the University College Dublin have published the three parts with a detailed introduction in 2007.<sup>33</sup> It is an addition to the eighteen volumes of the *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, which were published by University College Dublin Press. All volumes and an index volume are supposedly available following 2014.

## **Involvement and Detachment**

**I**n 1956 the essay “Problems of Involvement and Detachment” was published in *The British Journal of Sociology*. Here, for the first time, Elias did not take the investigation of one or more long-term processes as an occasion for general observations, but focused on the question of which preconditions needed to develop for humans to recognize at all the processes and figurations in which they are intertwined or with which they are living; and to define which problems have to be overcome to enable the evaluation of the gained research findings with an increasing distance to the own desires and ideals. This essay, which has been published in

33 Norbert Elias: *The Genesis of the Naval Profession*. Edited and with an introduction by René Mølker and Stephen Mennell. Dublin 2007.

expanded form as “Engagement und Distanzierung” (‘Involvement and Detachment’) in German in 1983,<sup>34</sup> is the knowledge-sociological extension of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”. This fundamental work found little response among English sociologists.

While in “Problems of Involvement and Detachment”, Elias had more generally dealt with the central problems of science, in his 1965 study “The Established and the Outsiders”,<sup>35</sup> he focussed on the empirical investigation of certain figurations of people. Together with pupils from Leicester, he had examined two different groups of inhabitants in an English working-class district and their relations.

## The Established and the Outsiders

It should suffice to refer to two essays and the book in order to prove that Elias did not only continue working on his major project after 1965, when he had returned to the German-speaking area, but was already back to working on it when he was still in exile in England—even though it re-

34 Norbert Elias: Involvement and Detachment. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Involvement and Detachment*, Vol. 8, UCD 2003.

35 Norbert Elias, John L. Scotson: *The Established and the Outsiders. A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems*. London 1965. See also the Dutch translation by Cas Wouters und Bram van Stolk “De gevestigden en de buitenstaanders. Een studie van de spanningen en machtsverhoudingen tussen twee arbeidersbuurten”, Utrecht, Antwerpen 1976, for which Norbert Elias wrote a new introduction: “A Theoretical Essay on Established—Outsiders Relations”—this was included in the 2<sup>nd</sup> English edition (1994, Sage, London). “The Established and the Outsiders” is Volume 4 of *The Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, UCD 2008.

ceived almost no response there. In the case of “The Established and the Outsiders”, English ignorance in this kind of sociology was, unfortunately, additionally accompanied by the publisher discontinuing their operation shortly after having published the book. Today, only a few copies exist in some English university libraries.

“The Established and the Outsiders” is, despite its empiric character, written in a narrative voice and, again, foregoes an extensive body of annotations, as it was common in the Anglo-American studies of the 1960s. Elias, notwithstanding his preference for this style that is an immense help to the readability, had meanwhile figured out that one cannot expect of the reader the very educational background and willingness for reflection that would be needed to understand the hidden indications to contemporary discussion. Therefore, he took a decided stand in three ‘appendices’, in particular to the system-theoretical juxtaposition of individual and society, social order and deviation and other dichotomies, like those used by the, in that time, predominant central theory.

## **“Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”: The Shadow of the Great Book**

**I**t needs to be noted then that at the moment of rediscovery—or rather, discovery—of his 1939 publication, Elias had already completed further important publications. Since then the number of publications had increased steadily. While in the 1970s he received attention mainly as the author of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”, Elias fi-

nally stepped out from the shadow of his book that has, in the meantime, come to be regarded a classical work. His long life has brought him the felicity and the satisfaction of a belated recognition of his pioneering work. He has not rested on these late laurels but continued his resolute work on expanding and improving the sociological knowledge of social processes and the examination of the figurations which humans form together.

The starting point of his work, however, remains “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”. I have briefly presented the publications after 1939, not least because, even though Elias does not always explicitly do so, connections can be drawn from them to the work of 1939. Back then, Elias’s process of the work and contemplation had reached a standard, a—to use one of his formulations—level of synthesis that heralded in a new phase in the history of sociology, whose contours are now, with each publication, becoming increasingly clearer in their fruitfulness and their significance for the further development of the discipline. But the decisive step into a new phase had already been taken during the second half of the 1930s, with the sociogenetic and psychogenetic examinations.

This book deals with the question of how this—still topical—classic emerged. If one asks about the circumstances of the prehistory, then it must be in the Eliasian sense which considers the ‘circumstances’ as the relationships between people. I will, therefore, attempt to trace the prerequisites and point out the framework conditions which made necessary the genesis of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” and possible through Elias. If I had to give the book, whose structure I will in the following elucidate, a motto that ap-

appropriately characterizes the work life of Norbert Elias, I would follow Kathrina Rutschky in saying: “only seldom is history this righteous”.<sup>36</sup>

36 Katharina Rutschky: Ein Stück deutscher Geschichte und Wissenschaft. Preface to Margarete Freudenthal: Gestaltwandel der städtischen, bürgerlichen und proletarischen Hauswirtschaft zwischen 1760 und 1910. Frankfurt/Main 1986, pp. VII–XXII (here: p. VIII).

# Second Chapter

## On the Plan of this Academic Work

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**B**ooks always have a context of origin; they do not simply emerge all of a sudden, they do not fall from heaven, mimicking creation. The same holds true for non-scientific as well as scientific literature. In fiction there are styles and fashions, sudden breakthroughs of new patterns and structures of language. The latter are rare exceptions and are particularly interesting for the literary studies. For instance, a whole journal was devoted to the writer Arno Schmidt and the decoding of his oeuvre: the *Bargfelder Bote*, discussed and analysed his body of work in all its particulars. But even in such case, biographical aspects are being screened. In doing so, one is not interested in crude objectives, like finding out when the author commenced writing, but rather whether there were circumstances in their lives which stood in direct or indirect correlation with their literary work, exerted influence or determined directions. I do not wish to keep it a secret that during the preparations one edition of the Arno Schmidt foundation has very much impressed and

influenced me: the study “Wu Hi?”<sup>1</sup> edited by Jan Philipp Reemtsma and Bernd Rauschenbach, is a particularly convincing blend of critical literary study and biography, providing an excellent density.

The same applies to scientific books; only here it is often easier to consider the membership in a certain school as context of origin. The recognizable affiliation to a paradigm is, as a rule, enough to recognize these contexts. More seldom are those books that make other superfluous. This also holds true for the so-called life works that systematically yield a one-time thought, by and by discussing it for all areas of life. Only in those cases where a break though has been accomplished, the questions concerning the context of origin can become meaningful which go beyond the categorisation into academic schools of thought, paradigm communities. This is true even in the natural sciences. An example worth reading is the description by Watson of the way to the discovery of the DNA molecular structure,<sup>2</sup> while, in this instance, it is of particular interest that the set objective of research had been achieved despite adverse circumstances. The final result is a discovery on which modern genetic research is based and which made it possible in the first place.

This is especially true in the case of the social sciences—where in particular persons who are associated with events in the history of sociology were and are at the centre of the

1 Jan Philipp Reemtsma, Bernd Rauschenberg (eds.): *Wu Hi?* Arno Schmidt in Görlitz, Lauban, Greiffenberg. Zürich/Bargfeld 1986.

2 James D. Watson: *Die Doppel-Helix. Ein persönlicher Bericht über die Entdeckung der DNS-Struktur.* Introduction by Heinz Haber. Reinbek near Hamburg 1973.

investigations. Therefore, the circumstances of Auguste Comte's life—he was the first person to use the term sociology for the newly emerging science at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century—have been extensively analysed and documented. Though Karl Marx's life course is known down to the last detail, its further valuation in view of his path-breaking work continues to be the subject of scientific discussions and disputes. With regard to the sociologists of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, this applies in particular to Max Weber. Although it is difficult for the concerned researchers to lift the cloak of secrecy, Marianne Weber and other relatives have purposefully laid over his biography. The interpretation of his biographical data and circumstances has been steered into a certain direction. This can be proven in a small example, which coincidentally demonstrates the importance of biographies for the interpretation of contexts of origins.

## Biographies and Biographers

If one follows the information and interpretations of Marianne Weber in her biography of her husband who died in 1920<sup>3</sup>—and until 1990 all of the biographies did so for a lack of other sources—, the mother had a decisive influence on the socialization of the young Max Weber. The educated-middle-class and religious-pietistic atmosphere of the parental home, predominantly shaped by the mother, ostensibly determined his life, its ups and downs. It seems reasonable to identify in this context Weber's access to his

3 Marianne Weber: Ein Lebensbild. Tübingen 1926.



well-known and important volume “Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus” (‘The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism’), and one may then arrive at the interpretation that the meaning which Weber attributes to religion may have something to do with the maternal parental home.

So far the biographies have followed this interpretation and have adopted the characterization of the father as a comfortable “bourgeois”, inclined to “pleasure and enjoyment”, and as having few interests and being resigned to his insignificance. Marianne Weber’s assessment virtually eclipsed all other known facts. Dirk Käsler has shown that another, very different characterization of the father is not only possible but obvious.<sup>4</sup> Max Weber sen. came from a wealthy East-Westphalian linen weaver family. He managed a grand house in Berlin and was politically as active as influential. From 1867–1897, with a short interruption, he was a member of the Prussian House of Representatives and from 1873–1884 a member of the German Reichstag. Käsler writes: “The ‘Lebensbild’, and with that all who write after him—reports ... that the leaders of the neo-liberal party, Benning- sen and Miquel, associated with the Weberian house, that the representatives Rickert and Kapp, the finance minister Hobrecht, but also the ‘stars in the academic sky’, Dilthey, Goldschmidt, Sybel, Treitschke and Mommsen, came to visit the Charlottenburg house”.<sup>5</sup> For Käsler, it is difficult

4 Dirk Käsler: *Der retuschierte Klassiker. Zum gegenwärtigen Forschungsstand der Biographie Max Webers*. Typescript of a lecture at the “Max-Weber-Conference”, German Sociological Association, Section: Sociological Theories, 19–21 June 1986, pp. 25 f.

5 Loc. cit., pp. 24 f.

to imagine “that all these men came on a regular basis only for the good cigars which the guest were provided with by the sons Max and Alfred after the dinner ... if he were nothing else than what his daughter-in-law wrote about him: ‘he remains what he is: a liberal bourgeois.’”<sup>6</sup>

As it can be seen, completely different constellations of the background and the according interpretation of the original context of Weber’s important works are possible. Maybe it was not at all the mother’s religious orientation but the energetic-capitalist attitude of the father that had a strong influence on the son. This then causes slight doubts whether it was not totally different motifs that led to “Die protestantische Ethik und der Geist des Kapitalismus”, which might change the assessment of said study.

I do not want to decide on this at this point. This little analogy is but an example of the significance of biographical data for scientific work. It also entails the urgent appeal to treat such evaluation sensitively. Even when a strong compositional interest, like that of Marianne Weber, is absent, precocious determination and the non-consideration of material can bias both the readers’ attention and later authors.

Nevertheless, an academic publication’s context of origin remains of interest, namely in particular where a study cannot readily be associated with a specific paradigm community. This holds true especially for “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” and its author. The book cannot be allocated within one of the paradigm communities of its time. The author did not belong to a particular sociological school, as we will see later on; a teacher-pupil relationship did not exist

6 Loc. cit., p. 25.

either. It is therefore not sufficient to present this book with regard to its new approach, but one has to ask for its prehistory, i.e. in which context and how at all it could come into being.

In doing so, the sensitive treatment of biographical data is one part of a difficult task. This has nothing to do with an obligation to discretely conceal data and processes. Rather, the task does in principle not differ from the 'normal' sociological research. Personal requirements and preference, as it was certainly the case with Marianne Weber, have to give in to a most accurate assessment of the facts at hand that is adequate for the examined object. Also, one has to take account of the circumstances of the time. The examiner's present life conditions must not be imposed on past circumstances. After all, it is both a past and, in contrast to present-day life conditions, a definable time period, which, by the way, has been insufficiently examined. The focus on the major book often obscures the biographical-scientific prehistory. The aim, therefore, is not a comprehensive biography, but the attempt to understand the life circumstances and working environments which date back 50 years and more.

## **Environment as Milieu**

**I**n the following, I focus on a certain period in Elias's work life. In its centre are "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation", its context of origin, its contents and the possibilities which have since become available for the academic work by sociologists. By pointing out studies done by younger sociologists, I want to show the opportunities, regarding theory as

well as empiricism, that are provided by a sociology relating to both the people and the processual development of the figurations these people form—a sociology as it had been represented by Elias since the 1930s.

In doing so, admittedly, only a section of the Eliasian works is being discussed. This reflects the idea that the intensive discussion of said topic and the related literature is extensive enough to serve as an initial introduction to the work and biography. As a matter of principle, introductions cannot replace self-study or the own perusal of the address literature addressed. They can call attention to the cornerstones of a position; and they can, as shall be attempted here, illustrate the new and the particular of said position. Such introductions could inspire, support and maybe save the reception for readers' own work and their individual analysis of the work from fallacies, but they cannot replace these individual approaches.

In connection with the context of origin, I have deliberately used the term 'milieu'. In doing so, I follow—with reservations—the suggestion developed and substantiated by Dirk Käsler in his book "Die frühe Soziologie 1909–1934 und ihre Entstehungs-Milieus".<sup>7</sup> His central assumption is that there exists a series of determinants which can help to, not exhaustively but insightfully, distinguish several milieus of emergence of early German sociology. Käsler differentiates three of these milieus: firstly, the milieu of origination which pertains to the socialization in the family of origin,

7 Dirk Käsler: Die frühe deutsche Soziologie 1909–1934 und ihre Entstehungs-Milieus. Eine wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchung. Opladen 1984.

secondly, the milieu of education and vocational training, and, finally, the milieu of academic career.

Käsler's fundamental assumption can be illustrated using an example. The most important sociologist of the first twenty years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century was, without doubt, Max Weber. He was born in 1864; his parents were part of the bourgeoisie, were protestant-liberal and lived in Berlin. Weber attended a humanistic high school and studied law in Berlin. He was a protestant of liberal orientation.

Around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, one of the most important German social scientists was Max Horkheimer, one of the key figures of the Frankfurt School. Born as a son of bourgeois-Jewish parents even before the turn of the century, he attended a humanistic high school, initially studied psychology, and then lived in Frankfurt without a religious but with a decidedly socialist orientation.

There is not yet a focus on a particular scientist in Käsler's work. He attempts to present differences in the generational groups and use these for the explanation of the development of sociology in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In doing so, he reaches the conclusion that the milieus of origination and education and vocational training were too similar to explain significant differences in the sociological positions. It was the milieus of academic career that had a critical influence. He manifoldly verified this on the basis of teacher-pupil and, better still, master-disciple relationships.

Without anticipating later explanations regarding Elias, one can observe that the particular in his biography is his ability to evade the formative influences of certain milieus of career. No teacher-pupil relationships can be identified, even less a master-disciple relationship. Käsler's point was

the depiction of groups, individual fate only interested him as a part of his entire survey and the question “What kind of people were those who—individually and jointly—established this new science called ‘sociology’”<sup>8</sup> could only be answered in general terms. In contrast, the text at hand is meant to comprehend the life journey of an individual. It is to be shown that, even at a young age, the contours of an academic programme began to show in the milieu of origination, but in particular in the milieus of education and vocational training, which Elias then worked on for his whole life.

## Norbert Elias: Oeuvre and Biography

The existing sources enable me to show that Elias early on developed a certain attitude which can be called scientific. However, it is difficult to extract individual events and encounters that were of particular, maybe even fundamental, importance. Especially because it is at least doubtful whether it is at all appropriate to define as responsible individual experiences and encounters for the chosen direction and different stages in the long-term development of a young person; or whether it would be better to examine it as the sum of interwoven factors.

Elias has spoken publicly about his biography. Besides in his “Notizen zum Lebenslauf”<sup>9</sup> (‘Notes on a lifetime’),

8 Dirk Käsler: Die frühe deutsche Soziologie, loc. cit., p. 22.

9 Norbert Elias: Notizen zum Lebenslauf. In: Peter Gleichmann, Johan Goudbloom, Hermann Korte (eds.): Macht und Zivilisation. Materialien zu Norbert Elias’ Zivilisationstheorie 2. Frankfurt/Main 1984, pp. 9–82. The English translation ‘Notes on a lifetime’ is part of Vol-

this happened most sustainably in the WDR (West German Broadcasting) television film “Man läßt sich fallen und man fängt sich auf. Norbert Elias – Menschenwissenschaftler”<sup>10</sup> by Ulrich Gembar dt and Christian Feyerabend, which had been the sum of numerous personal conversations between Elias and Gembar dt. Maybe Gembar dt, who was only separated from Elias by one generation, had a particularly good access. Furthermore, there was a four-hour radio interview by Carmen Thomas for a ‘Hallo Ü-Wagen’ programme on 30 May 1984<sup>11</sup> and autobiographical conversations with Dutch sociologists, who turned them into a cover story for the so-called colour supplement of the weekly magazine *Vrij Nederland* on 1 December 1984. Moreover, there are a couple of reports and recollections by third parties; however, with few exceptions, these only relate to the times in Heidelberg, Frankfurt and in exile. From his schooldays, I have only two reports. Most of his classmates did not survive the First World War. The majority of his Jewish relatives and acquaintances are victims of the Holocaust. Occasionally, Elias, too, appears in reports and recollections of third parties about Heidelberg and Frankfurt.

Elias had just left the Heidelberg student circle for Frankfurt when was joined by Golo Mann who described it in his youthful memories.<sup>12</sup>

ume 17 of the Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections, UCD 2013.

10 First broadcast on 31 October 1985.

11 Added to Vol. 17 of the ‘Gesammelte Schriften’ is a CD with a segment of the interview.

12 Golo Mann: *Erinnerungen und Gedanken. Eine Jugend in Deutschland*. Frankfurt/Main 1986. Concerning this, see in particular pp. 279–291 and pp. 377–413.

I have attempted to verify autobiographical statements and recollections of third parties as far as this was possible. On the one hand, by inspecting files in the university archives of Breslau, Heidelberg, Freiburg and Frankfurt, on the other hand by surveying persons who knew Elias and/or his life circumstances in the individual periods.

I will therefore try to include biographical circumstances in the explanation of important components of the civilization theory and process sociology. I do so because in the case of Elias I am convinced that neither a biography irrespective of his work nor a history of his oeuvre that is irrespective of his biography would be possible. There are cases, with this I am following Stefan Blankertz, when “the individual of the author” appears as “an integral part of the intellectual performance” and Immanuel Kant’s self-assessment “Of ourselves we are silent; it is about the cause”<sup>13</sup> cannot be accepted. Books do not always have a monopoly position as the source of explanation. Without knowledge about the previous periods of development, the significance of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” cannot be adequately understood; without knowledge about the biographical circumstances, the intellectual performance cannot be adequately evaluated. Even when person and oeuvre are not a unity, they are nevertheless related to each other.

Based on these considerations, the structure of the book was developed. Initially, information is given on the basic problems of sociology, problems which, in a certain manifestation, influenced the sociology of the 1920s and 1930s. It

13 “Von uns selbst schweigen wir, es geht um die Sache”, Stefan Blankertz: Kritischer Pragmatismus. Zur Soziologie Paul Goodmans. Wetzlar 1983, p. 111.



is followed by a chapter on the parental home, school and studies, which concludes with the successful completion of the doctorate. A chapter each is dedicated to the time in Heidelberg and Frankfurt as well as to the Zurich 'Soziologentag' 1928, the sociologists' annual conference. Subsequently, a long chapter presents the main arguments in "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation". The following chapter then deals with the years in exile. It concludes with the time of the Heidelberg 'Soziologentag' of 1964 until the awarding of the Adorno Prize in 1977, bringing Elias the public appreciation for which he had waited so long.

# Third Chapter

## In Front of the Mirror

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In front of the University of Paris, on the Place de la Sorbonne, stands a statue of Auguste Comte. He was the first person to use the word ‘sociology’ for a new science, and he was very likely also the first sociologist, as we will see later on. In his science and his person, many characteristics can be found to identify sociology and the scholars practicing it until today. The most insignificant in this context is the fact that both work and person had already been disputed during Comte’s lifetime. Besides the statue, a street reminds of him. When walking from the Place de la Sorbonne to the Boulevard St. Michel, towards the Jardin du Luxembourg, behind the Ecole Nature des Mines, one can make a turn to the right into the Rue Auguste Comte. A third place also evokes memories of him: traversing the Boulevard St. Michel near the Place de la Sorbonne, one reaches the Rue de Vaugirard, after a few steps turns right into the Rue Monsieur-le-Prince; on the left hand side lies the house no 28. Here is situated the apartment in which Auguste Comte died on 8 September 1857 and had lived at least the last fifteen years before his death.

It is not easy to find the apartment. Earl Edward Eubank had great difficulty in finding and entering it in 1934.<sup>1</sup> Wolf Lepenies likewise relates about his visit in the early 1980s. But it is worth the trouble, as he reports: “If one is lucky and has entered the apartment, one is surprised about how Comte’s spirit remained alive in it. You cannot elude the seriousness of this life, in which misery always accompanied fame. Comte’s self-centredness becomes painfully noticeable. He had decreed in his will that not even the slightest alteration may be made to his apartment. His desk stands where it stood when Comte used it, namely at a wall. Mounted on the latter is a mirror, occupying the complete width of the desk. While writing, Comte always saw himself.”<sup>2</sup> One could also say: While writing about society, Comte always saw himself and was thus keeping in sight the basic problem of any sociological venture. Unlike most of the other human scientists, sociologists are always part of their object of investigation, viz. the society in which they are living, and in doing so they are also writing about their own social role. Comte’s mirror—one could continue the metaphor—was still completely opaque. Today, sitting in front of said mirror, we could fairly well look through it. We are writing a lot less just about us, but the mirror image will not vanish completely. It will fade, but the contours will remain.

- 1 Dirk Käsler: *Soziologische Abenteuer. Earl Edward Eubank besucht europäische Soziologen im Sommer 1934*. Opladen 1985, pp. 156 f.
- 2 Wolf Lepenies: *Die drei Kulturen. Soziologie zwischen Literatur und Wissenschaft*. München/Wien 1985, p. 48.

## The Opaque Mirror: Reminders of the First Sociologists

**A**uguste Comte, who was born in post-revolutionary France in 1798, was not yet able to recognize the problem of the opaque mirror. He was entirely entangled in the intellectual debates of his time, which emerged between the aristocracy running out of power, the bourgeoisie gaining power, and the proletariat becoming more important. His achievement placed a new science alongside philosophy and the natural sciences. The new science's central idea was that the existence and the development of human society could be understood or explained neither by philosophical abstractions nor by the mere equation with nature.

The starting point of his reflections was questions that were posed in particular by the upper classes. These concerned the causes for the outbreak of revolutions, the emergence of new institutions and the reasons for the repeated dissolution of these new institutions. Comte found that these questions were responded to neither by the natural sciences nor by the philosophers of the Enlightenment. Admittedly, both had eroded the interpretive monopoly of Catholic theory, but the perceptions of the French Enlightenment—based on natural law and encompassing sovereignty of the reason, freedom of conscience and equality—seemed to him unsuitable as structural elements of the new social situation, which was determined by the rise of the bourgeoisie and the working class. Certainly, this order cannot explain all elements from the Comtean system, though it works for the most substantial.

Comte's answers to the questions of his time are charac-

terized by a renunciation of the epistemological monopoly of—as he called it—metaphysical philosophy, in particular the search for the absolute truth that assigned each rational individual an entirely superelevated place within the social system. He also turned away from the biological reductionism of the natural sciences, concerning the reflection of social issues. With that he took a first but decisive step for the constitution of sociology as a relatively autonomous science, “which has made it its task to *empirically and causally* explain the *entirety* of human relationships and culture”.<sup>3</sup>

But Comte is not just an analyst and theorist. He is also concerned with a third issue: the development of action alternatives. The goal is the reconciliation of order and progress in the historical process, the definitive establishment of harmonious, social circumstances in which the adaption of order and progress are no longer executed through revolutionary changes. This is meant to be the substance and objective of sociology. Only 24 years of age, Comte described the foundations which he would later develop further, namely in his essay “Plan der wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, die vor einer Reform der Gesellschaft notwendig sind” (‘Plan of the scientific operations necessary for the reorganization of society’), which Dieter Prokop classified as a “Jugendwerk”, i.e. an early work accomplished in his youth years.<sup>4</sup> Later, in 1854, this essay could be found in the four-

3 Werner Sombart: Die Anfänge der Soziologie. In: Melchior Palyi (ed.): Hauptprobleme der Soziologie. Erinnerungsausgabe für Max Weber. Volume 1. München/Leipzig 1923, pp. 3–19 (here: p. 6).

4 Dieter Prokop: Auguste Comte. Massenbewußtsein und praktischer Positivismus. Vorwort zu Auguste Comte: Plan der wissenschaftlichen Arbeiten, die für eine Reform der Gesellschaft notwendig sind. München 1973, pp. 9–32 (here: p. 9).

volume work “Système de politique positive”. The first publication still took place in a volume edited by Claude-Henri Saint-Simon.

Saint-Simon (1760–1815), whose pupil and temporary secretary was Comte, is one of the persons who are counted among the pioneers of the same sociological positions which Comte then established.

But Saint-Simon is not the only one. In his “Geschichte der Soziologie”, H.L. Stoltenberg identified the first beginnings during the time of the ancient Greeks, for instance at Thucydides.<sup>5</sup> Even if one does not go as far back as he does there are, nonetheless, important pioneers, e.g. in the 18<sup>th</sup> century in France but also in England (Robert Malthus, William Godwin, David Ricardo), who addressed the long-term developments of societies. This becomes clear when one considered the precursors of Comte’s Law of Three Stages that is still to be discussed. Turgot’s Theory of Three Stages of the Spirit rather generally dealt with a transition of theology via metaphysics to the positive science. Saint-Simon has further and in detail expanded this. In his Three-Stages-theory, the development of the social-governmental order begins with medieval feudal constitutions. It then proceeds via the emerging parliamentarianism to the industrial system, whose beginning Saint-Simon sees in the French revolution.

5 Hans L. Stoltenberg: Geschichte der Soziologie. In: Alfred Vierkandt (ed.): Handwörterbuch der Soziologie. Stuttgart 1931, pp. 579–588 (here: p. 579 f.).

## Stages of Development of Knowledge and Cognition

In his deliberations, Comte is more thorough and more comprehensive than Saint-Simon, and he breaks more radically with the intellectual edifices of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century, in particular in terms of the very philosophical epistemology which suspects a mediator of a superior power or an overarching order behind social phenomena. He can then develop an alternative, a positive policy, his synonym for sociology. Equipped with observational methods based on the precise natural sciences, it was meant to dispel all speculation and should thus enable the investigators to recognize the regular character of social development.

For Comte, history is the progress of accumulated knowledge and the resulting human engagement with nature. In his Law of Development, human knowledge, both the social and the individual, passes through three successive stages. Criteria for the classification are the specific forms of human understanding of nature. The stages are differentiated by the increasing subordination of fantasy to accurate observation and by the degree of separation of theory and practice.

In the first stage—a theological-fictitious, divided into fetishism, polytheism and monotheism—reasoning tends to interpret all natural phenomena as a result of supernatural powers and entities. An entity analogous to the human is attributed to the non-human figure in fetishism and to the multiplicity of gods in polytheism. In monotheism, the general feeling of a necessary connection of all phenomena to a god arises. Nature is no longer a fantastical, arbitrary en-

tity but now is considered a god who establishes all of its principles.

Comte denotes the second stage as the metaphysical-abstract. It is a kind of an interlude in which the individual sciences become increasingly positive. The moving causes of the world affairs are no longer considered transcendent but are assigned secular-abstract principles—like reasons and substance. The legal contract becomes constitutive of society. Even though important sciences (astronomy, physics, and biology) had already become positive, when considering the social, the primacy of fantasy still prevailed over observation. The metaphysical spirit shows his power in the secularization of theological authorities.

The third and definitively ultimate stage is the scientific-positive. It sets the endpoint in the history of scientific development. At this stage all sciences have become positive, sociology emerged as their crowning. Based on intersubjective observation, the explanation of nature and the human society was now restricted to proving the regularity, or the consistency, of phenomena and the laws influencing them. The positive spirit is qualified by the banishment of the absolute from the sciences and by the immutability of the natural laws in terms of the cultural sequence.

Comte allocates a succession of political institutions for the stages of the development of knowledge and recognition where it is not difficult to detect phases of European history. As a substrate for this observation, Comte verbalized the crucial cornerstones of all social development: conquest and production. In the theological-military stage, monarchy is the political expression of divine right and the supernatural structuring of society. Advancement is only possible



through conquest. The metaphysical-legal stage, in turn, is an intermediary. Situated between conquest and production, it gives rise to a class of legal scholars, secularizing divine right and establishing natural law. In the third, the scientific-industrial stage, the sole objective for social organisation is production, the optimization of human engaging with nature aided by the positive sciences. Industry is the guarantor of a peaceful development.

If one asks for the driving forces behind this development, Comte, who actually wants to overcome metaphysics and speculation, refers to the mystic tendency of the human spirit for self-improvement. However, he relates the perfection only to the optimization of the human engagement with nature—in the sense of instrumentally rational action for conquest and production. At the positive stage, production is referred to in its general characteristics, and observation is thus removed as a specific form of human engagement with nature. Postulated in the positive stage by Comte as purpose, production is now proceeding consistently. This is one of the immunization strategies applied by Comte. The humans' relationships to each other in production are not made a subject of discussion.

## **Causes for Criticizing Comte**

**T**he strategy of immunization already gave cause for criticism, as had been dealt out in general regarding his draft. Logically immanent, it should be noted that, for instance, that the Law of the Three Stages had not been derived from the respective epoch. In this regard Comte con-

tradicts the primacy of the observation, he himself had drawn up. His categories are not yielded from the historical material and the analysis of the stages; they are structural principles that were retrospectively imposed upon history. He did not substantiate his law with a corresponding proof but implied that the core thesis of the Three-Stage-Law, the progress in human understanding of nature, has been sufficiently documented and proven by the development of the individual sciences.

The general criticism, like it was verbalized, *inter alia*, by Massing,<sup>6</sup> focused on a counter-revolutionary impulse. Comte undoubtedly takes sides with the French bourgeoisie and stands against the proletariat. Margarethe Steinhauer pointed out that this partisanship was no longer based on the categories of freedom and equality, on whose behalf the feudal absolutism had been combatted. “The thought is not too distant”, she writes, “that the Cometean interpretation of the bourgeois revolution is directed against the interests of the underprivileged strata in the bourgeois state and, objectively, are at the service of the power relations that had been newly established after 1789”.<sup>7</sup>

Overcoming the anarchy of the post-revolutionary society, according to Comte, took a steady and stable order. For this he formulated an ideal final state in his Law of Three Stages. Since there was not yet a general social consensus for this final state, the development was attested the characteris-

6 Otwin Massing: *Fortschritt und Gegenrevolution. Die Gesellschaftslehre Comtes in ihrer sozialen Funktion.* Stuttgart 1966.

7 Margarethe Steinhauer: *Die politische Soziologie Comtes und ihre Differenz zur liberalen Gesellschaftstheorie Condorcets.* Meisenheim am Glan 1966, pp. 49 f.

tics of a natural law. Comte's objective was the reconciliation of order and progress; this was portrayed as the a priori of a natural law. Since nobody could genuinely be opposed to the nature of things, sociology, with the aid of its evidences of scientific politics, was able to influence the classes to not hinder the natural course of things.

Comte constitutes the hypostatisation of the ultimate goal, the affirmation of a 'natural' development and of an organic theory and, lastly, the immunization of the first two points with reference to the positivistic foundation of sociology. By doing so, he protects his system against other, competing target projections. At the same time, these three points demonstrate where and why Comte's sociology is accused of being an ideology. The ostensible legitimization though positive science, which replaces empirical verifiability and explanatory value, constitutes Comte's sociology as the ideology of a definition of reality par excellence.

## **While Writing, They are Seeing Themselves: Sociologists and the Society**

I have cited these points of criticism because I do not want to hastily be ranked among the considerable group of the naïve Comte admirers. Moreover, I have done so because Comte is the founder of sociology in this regard, too. The suspicion of ideology has accompanied the work of sociologists since this time. If and why a position is or could be non-ideological, this has also—directly or indirectly—been addressed by the sociological debate since then. This does by no means reduce Comte's pioneering achievement, because

it is inextricably linked with the constitution of the scientific discipline sociology. The sociologists are still sitting in front of the mirror and, in writing, also still see themselves.

Comte's significance lies in the renunciation of metaphysical philosophy as an overemphasis of the spiritual for the development of human societies, as well as in the formulation of social criteria for the classification of the development of society. In Comte's deliberations, this is initially limited to the development of knowledge. These two new elements of the developing science sociology are completed by a third—namely the perception that sociology has to, and indeed could, act politically. During the current crisis, Comte saw sociology's role as an instance which exercised a moderating influence on those in combat, which clarified the absurdness of the outrage on each side, the governed and the governing, and which could preclude later social and political conflicts. At a time when the basic structures of the bourgeois society developed only slowly, he anticipated contradictions resulting from the ownership structures and the technical progress. In addition, he, biasedly and ideologically, called for harmonizing institutions which give insight into social situations and inevitabilities.

Comte was not too successful with his suggestions. Furthermore, he was—to put it mildly—a bit quirky. This eventually made it easy for the proponents of the still powerful old *scientific establishment* to ostracize him both scientifically and socially. But once they were posed, his questions persisted and, circa thirty years later, found once again an answer through Karl Marx. This time it was more thorough, scientifically sound and with long-term results. On the one hand, both had in common that they tried to find answers

to the urgent social questions of their time and, on the other hand, both understood that adequate responses could no longer be found without well-founded research. The third commonality was the basic realization that the problems of society, conflicts and tensions were not the mistakes of individual persons or groups but that the reasons lie in, and have to be found in, the development and structure of the society.

## **A Focus on Humans and Their Cohabitation: Karl Marx**

**I**n light of the magnificent range of Karl Marx's lifetime achievement, no attempt is being made to exhaustively appreciate it in the present work. I do not consider it a degradation of Karl Marx's scientific achievement when I focus only on a few points, which testify to his innovative power and at the same time help to understand why he continues to challenge the social sciences, in fact all human sciences and most certainly sociology, until this day. I will discuss three points: the theory of class and class struggle, Marx's conception of history and his handling of ideological problems.

Marx turns his focus on people and their co-existence. One cannot stress enough this seemingly trivial statement, because until then—with few exceptions—philosophical abstractions had rather obfuscated that philosophizing about ethics or logic, about reason or the subject, actually refers to people not intellectual games. This allowed Marx to take a very different approach to the reality of human intercon-

nections. For instance, in the case of conflicts among social groups but also in terms of the hunger of the many people, the poverty of one part of the population and the exploitation of the workforce.

A theoretical model was devised, which included the early stages of social development into the analysis of the 19<sup>th</sup>-century class struggles. Based on it, Marx also drafted a law of development concerning human societies, a theory of the workers' social situation in the early days of capitalism, and, lastly, social therapy—indeed the promise of a better life, for the suspension of class differences was meant to lead to happiness for all people.

## Classes and Class Struggles

**M**arx has formulated the class theory most precisely in his Communist Manifesto. It begins with the sentence: “The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”.<sup>8</sup> He is, however, not the first to make a class division. For Marx, too, the roots date back to the previous century, e.g. the physiocrats—and here especially to the medical practitioner Quesnay. The latter’s ‘*tableau économique*’ contained of three social classes: the productive, the class of the property owners and the so-called sterile class. The first two are the tenants with their peasants and the landowners, who yielded the majority of the revenues. Everything that has nothing to do with agriculture, and thus

8 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party, C.H. Kerr & Co, Chicago 1906, p. 19.

did not contribute to the augmentation of God's creation, was regarded as a part of the sterile class.<sup>9</sup>

Marx aptly describes the relationship to the precursors of his theory: "As far as I am concerned, I do not claim the merit to have discovered either the existence of the classes in modern society or their struggle amongst themselves. Bourgeois historians have long before me delineated the historical development of the struggle of the classes, and bourgeois economists have described its economic anatomy. The new aspect I introduced was 1. proving that the *existence of classes* is merely linked to a *certain historical development phase of production*; 2. that the class struggle necessarily leads to the *dictatorship of the proletariat*; 3. that this dictatorship only constitutes the transition to the *suspension of all classes* and to a *classless society*".<sup>10</sup>

The first point Marx mentions in this period already indicates that in the two phases preceding the capitalism of the bourgeois society (slavery, feudal society), there are classes in principle, but the order of the estates is not only determined by them. It was not until capitalism that the relation to the means of production became the key criterion. However, Iring Fetscher observed that "the pre-bourgeois social differentiation, too, is ultimately based on a specific position within the production process"<sup>11</sup> and the division of the

9 Cf. Gabor Kiss: Einführung in die soziologische Theorie I. Vergleichende Analyse soziologischer Hauptrichtungen. 3<sup>rd</sup>, rev. ed. Opladen 1977, pp. 70 ff.

10 Karl Marx: Marx an Joseph Weydemeyer (5 March 1852), MEW, Berlin 1973, pp. 507 f.

11 Iring Fetscher (ed.): Grundbegriffe des Marxismus. Eine lexikalische Einführung. Hamburg 1976, p. 56.

people into “oppressing and oppressed”<sup>12</sup> had an economic basis. It is therefore possible to apply the term ‘class’ to all previous phases of development, with the exception of the primeval society. Unlike the descriptive concept of stratum, which Western sociology used during the 1950s and 1960s, Marx’s concept of class is analytical. The point is not the variation of a characteristic, as in the case of the term ‘stratum’ (more or less income, more or less professional prestige), but the existence of certain characteristics. According to Marx, one either owns the means of production or not. Or, but not a little.

The second point of the above quote indicates that the class struggles, which have determined the course of history up to now, become more intense during the various stages. But only in the capitalist society—where, highly polarized, the increasingly smaller classes of the capitalist are up against the increasingly larger classes of the proletariat—the circumstances have heated up enough for the oppressed and exploited to recognize and (successfully) fight them. In order for this to take place, the proletariat has to become a class for itself. Its members have to become aware of their joint situation and develop general strategies that transcend local, economical conflict—this means, above all, they have to organize themselves. This distinguishes them from the people who are only a ‘class in itself’, like the French small-holding peasants. Their economic conditions demarcate them as a class, but their life conditions do not create com-

12 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party, loc. cit., p. 31.



monalities or organization. “Consequently, they are incapable of enforcing their class interest in their own name”.<sup>13</sup>

It is, therefore, crucial—and the communication conditions and the growing transport infrastructure foster this—to inform the proletariat about their position, support the process of formation of class consciousness, and thus transform the functional dependence of those owning the means of production on those owning the productive force labour into a dominating position, namely the dictatorship of the proletariat. A process which, according to Marx, would inevitably happen, since the increasing insight into the relations of exploitation—the increasing power of organization on the one hand, the self-destruction of the capitalists on the other hand—could lead to no other result.

The third point of the above quote deals with the transition from the dictatorship of the proletariat to the classless, communist society. Marx said nothing specific about how life in this societal model would be; also, as per his understanding of the social development, he could not have said anything about it. He had described regularities making the societal model seem limited. His theory was the conceptual expression of the proletariat’s liberation struggle; a theory which could not be developed until the phase of capitalism. The phase after the next can only be imagined when it becomes visible historically along with the next phase. The general direction in which the destination lies, is nonetheless determined by the latter phase. While previously the course of the history of human society seemed more like fate

13 Karl Marx: *The 18th Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*. New York 2008, p. 124.

than the result of subjective assessment of the social conditions, Marx encouraged the overcoming of the current state of society, in which “man himself, with full consciousness, will make his own history”.<sup>14</sup>

## The Conception of History

While, based on its inevitably political character and its teleology, class theory had met with adverse criticism and can either be accepted or rejected, the conception of history that formed the basis for historical materialism had a more indirect, varied and far-reaching impact. However, it is difficult to delineate it, since there is no sophisticated concept. This may seem surprising at first glance. Marx says at one point: “We know only a single science, the science of history”.<sup>15</sup> But he can forego detailed descriptions because, as Urs Jaeggi records, from the outset Marx assumed that a specific historiography is superfluous because all sciences must reflect the history of their research object.<sup>16</sup> I will attempt to characterize the conception of history in five successive statements. At the same time, these statements can illustrate the impact potential of the Marxian conception.

At first it has to be determined how history, more precisely the historical process, came about. Marx replies that

14 Friedrich Engels: *Anti-Dühring*. Herr Eugen Dühring's Revolution in Science, Moscow 1947, p. 368 f.

15 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The German Ideology*, New York 1998, p. 34.

16 Cf. Urs Jaeggi: *Theoretische Praxis. Probleme eines strukturalen Marxismus*. Frankfurt/Main 1976, p. 144 ff.

the people's free, conscious labour has constitutive functions for history. A conscious life activity is characteristic for humans. This generic character of humans has constitutive functions for history, because the "satisfaction of the first need, the action of satisfying and the instrument of satisfaction which has been acquired, leads to new needs; and this creation of new needs is the first historical act".<sup>17</sup>

This first point directly leads to the second. History is human practice. Human activity determines the course of history: "*History does nothing*, it 'possesses *no* immense wealth', it 'wages *no* battles'. It is *man*, real living man, that does all that, that possesses and fights".<sup>18</sup> Why all of this happens—and this is Marx's third statement—was summed up by Engels at the Marx's funeral: "mankind must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing"<sup>19</sup> before they can pursue anything, be that science, be that politics. The historical act of satisfaction of needs requires material production. The social sciences, one could thus transcribe it, has to "expound[ ] the real process of production—starting from the material production of life itself".<sup>20</sup>

With regard to the material production, and this is the fourth point, it does not depend on what is being produced but how it is done. The invention of the steam engine and its

17 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The German Ideology*, New York 1998, p. 48.

18 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The Holy Family. Or Critique of Critical Critique*, Moscow 1956, p. 126.

19 *Der Sozialdemokrat*, 22 March 1883, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1883/death/dersozi.htm>.

20 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The German Ideology*, New York 1998, p. 61.

utilization as a pump does not bring forth actual change. It “did not give rise to any industrial revolution. It was, on the contrary, the invention of machines that made a revolution in the form if steam-engines necessary”.<sup>21</sup> Profound social changes only took places after human labour was replaced by machine power.

In the application on the current development, it can be said that the machine tool increasingly replaced skilled labour. Even if the Taylorization of manual labour had only commenced on a large scale in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the process began much earlier. Something similar applies to the Taylorization of mental work by the computer technology, a process that will only reach its full effectiveness during the ongoing 21<sup>st</sup> century.

It is, therefore, the mode of production that characterizes the social order. This finds expression in the “sum of interrelations, the relations within which these individuals stand”.<sup>22</sup> The thus determined social relations as product of human activity should not be seen as static. Marx already recognized the problem that humans tend to see social relations as static and to materially specify current stages of development. Hence, he called attention—and this is the fifth and the last point I want to mention—to the fact that the active behaviour of the interrelated humans defines the process character of the society. Leo Kofler puts it like this: “The knowledge that social objects are not things but relations

21 Karl Marx: *Capital. A Critique of Political Economy*, New York 1906, pp. 409 f.

22 Karl Marx: *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, New York 1973, p. 265.

between humans intensifies to the point where objects are wholly dissolved into processes”.<sup>23</sup>

## **The Problem of Ideology: The Twisted Mirror**

**M**arx has unambiguously formulated his relationship to the problem of ideology. In the course of his opus, he linked the term ideology increasingly closer to the class character of the manufacturing capitalist society. Initially, for the criticism of religion, religion is depicted as an inverted consciousness, functioning to make the wretched existence bearable for people. In the “Deutschen Ideologie”<sup>24</sup> this changes insofar as ideology is no longer the expression of wretchedness but is understood as a response to the wretched conditions. Eventually, in the “Kritik der politischen Ökonomie” (‘A Critique of Political Economy’),<sup>25</sup> ideology is a category of the manufacturing society, not differing from all the other categories. The actual relationships between wage labour and capital are no longer recognizable in the products. Likewise, the intellectual products are an expression of capitalist relations of production, too—being determines consciousness—and are ideological, since only

23 Leo Kofler: *Geschichte und Dialektik*. Darmstadt/Neuwied (3) 1973, p. 313.

24 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The German Ideology*, New York 1998; Karl Marx: Friedrich Engels: *Die deutsche Ideologie*, MEW, Berlin 1969.

25 Karl Marx: *Grundrisse. Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy*, New York 1973. Karl Marx: *Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie (Rohentwurf) 1857–1858*. Berlin 1953.

the ruling class of the capitalists can be interested in the intellectual products and their perpetuation or implementation.

Marx understands his work to be critical and takes side with the proletariat that, as a historical power, alone was in a position to strip the ideological veil of the relationships. Therefore, he can avoid the accusation of ideology. He represented “the class whose vocation in history is the overthrow of the capitalist mode of production and the final abolition of all classes—the proletariat”.<sup>26</sup> He thus avoids the observation that the being determines the consciousness. The fact that he is able to recognize the context with critical intention is well-nigh the proof that it cannot apply to him. The mirror in front of which Comte sat does still exist, but it is twisted in a way that it only shows others, not those sitting in front of it.

Unlike Auguste Comte—who, a couple of decades prior and with relatively little effect, had preached his social theory and political therapy—the Marxian position had a lasting effect. Too great was the wretchedness of the workers, too resounding seemed his political-economic analysis, and too promising was the ultimate goal of a free society of self-determined people, reached by the struggle of the united proletarians.

In Meyer’s ‘Konversations-Lexikon’ of 1890, the entry on the “socialist agitator and writer” Karl Marx, who had passed away in 1883, concludes with the statement: “Although the opus is the scientifically most important of the socialist lit-

26 Karl Marx: Afterword to the Second German Edition of *Capital*, in: Marx and Engels Collected Works, vol. 35, Moscow 1996, p. 16.

erature, its value is smaller than believed by Marx and his followers”.<sup>27</sup> This was a substantial error of assessment since his name and lessons could not be permanently passed over either in the political movements or in the social sciences could. The investigations of production relations, which the people had developed in their engagement with nature, and of the importance regarding the ownership of production means represent important progress in the social sciences’ explanation of social relations and their formation. The significance of the latter for sociology is comparable with the Newton’s contribution to physics.

## Heidelberg and Sociology

All sociologists before and after the turn of the century, and up to the present day, have to deal directly or indirectly with the theoretical and methodological suggestions made by Marx, this “colossal figure”<sup>28</sup> of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Simply put, there were two complexes of problem that concerned them. Firstly, they were dealing with the search for other than the economic-materialistic reasons for the development or change of societies and their social differentiation. This was not only important for the sociological explanation of the social conditions, it also provided for the solution to the other problem Marx had brought to sociology and the sociologists with his statement: “Being determines the consciousness”. How would it be any longer possi-

27 Meyers Konversations-Lexikon. Eine Enzyklopädie des allgemeinen Wissens. 4<sup>th</sup> rev. ed., vol. 11. Leipzig/Wien 1890, p. 303.

28 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, loc. cit., p. 16.

ble to think non-ideologically, to find scientific explanations in the Marxist sense independent from economic developments? How could one find and define oneself as a self-determined individual within the socialized interconnections? These questions were not only of scientific relevance, they also had and have significance for the self-conception and self-confidence of the people, in particular of intellectuals who have got to be particularly concerned about the notion that it is not their individual spirit which moves the courses of the world.

After the First World War, Heidelberg was one of the academic locations where these questions were intensively and extensively discussed. Max Weber has lived and, to some extent, taught there, and his answers—for instance concerning bureaucracy and domination, concerning the freedom from value judgment and concerning the ideal type—had an impact on the sociological discussions at that time and later. In the mid-1920s, the teaching staff included his brother Alfred Weber, who was somewhat overshadowed by him, the goal-oriented and bustling widow Marianne and a young private lecturer named Karl Mannheim (a pupil of Lukács') who had fled from the Horthy regime in Hungary.

The one—Alfred Weber—represented a liberal-conservative cultural sociology, with which he attempted to prove that the culture of a society—for example, the religion or the art—is an autonomous aspect and not traceable to economic conditions. Whereas Mannheim—following Marxist theory—fought for (another) way out of the intellectual quandary of the dualism of consciousness devoid of being and being devoid of consciousness. Unlike Marx, who had excluded the own group from the suspicion of ideology,



Mannheim radically included himself and his thought in the ideology-critical questioning.

Norbert Elias met the two—and also many others whom we know as important representatives of social science perspectives—when he, now aged 27, arrived in Heidelberg at the end of 1924. In January of the same year he had finished his doctorate in philosophy in Breslau, possessed only rudimentary knowledge of sociology but had a biography which provided him with the necessary preconditions to enter into the intellectual discussions of the Heidelberg sociologists.

# Fourth Chapter

## Childhood, Youth, Maturation

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The title of this chapter is identical to that of a classical study on neo-Kantian scientific pedagogy.<sup>1</sup> I have incorporated the reference to this position for two reasons. Firstly, it emphatically indicates the process character of coming of age. Secondly, this process is, above all, understood as an intellectual engagement that is being structured in the individual phases of young age by questioning and learning. This is not meant to lessen the importance of psycho-social approaches, but the development of the ego between the id and the superego has at times neglected importance. The young persons have to individually develop a consciousness of themselves and their possibilities. How they accomplish this depends on the tasks they are facing. “The maturing person is actually considered a maturing human. Their thinking and desire are not attracting a

1 Alfred Petzelt: *Kindheit – Jugend – Reifezeit. Grundriß der Phasen psychischer Entwicklung*. Freiburg (5) 1965.

charge of blind mechanisms at whose mercy or disposal they are”.<sup>2</sup>

My concern is the connection between individual development and the social framework, therefore a general reference to the Jewish parental home does not suffice. Rather it also has to be investigated what kind of individual form it had, whereat—and this is one of the thematic focusses of this chapter—growing up in a Jewish middle-class family, after the turn of the century until the First World War, did set some quite significant social and psychic framework conditions. The connection of individual acts with the social framework did not serve arbitrary speculation of the ‘it could have gone very differently’ but contributed to the reasonable belief that certain attitudes and behaviours of the adults have individual roots in childhood and youth.

## **Jewish Middle Class and Prussian-Humanistic Education: The Parents, ‘Fräuleins’, Teachers and Classmates**

**N**orbert Leo Elias was born on 22 June 1897 as the first and only child of the spouses Hermann and Sophie Elias in Breslau.<sup>3</sup> The father was a wealthy merchant and owned a factory for textile processing that manufactured

2 Wolfgang Fischer: *Der junge Mensch. Ein Beitrag zur pädagogischen Theorie der Reifezeit.* 2<sup>nd</sup>, rev. ed. Freiburg 1966, p. 36.

3 I thank Adrian Jitschin for pointing out the second given name. As it seems, Elias never used it. His publications, curriculum vitae and autobiographical statements do not mention it, and all identification papers, so far as they are known, are made out to Norbert E.



**Figure 2** Hermann Elias, the father

suits for wholesalers. Even before the First World War, he retired from his professional life and became a man of private means. He was a self-made man, who was proud of the achieved results and of his respected honorary post at the tax authority during retirement.

The marriage was traditionally attuned to the husband's authority. During the interview with Carmen Thomas, Elias reported that the marriage of his parents was focused on his father making all financial decisions. His mother led a sociable life with a large circle of friends. She looked after all the private contacts. His parents had not been particularly devout Jews, but his mother had kept the household kosher so that the grandparents could join them for dinner.

As it was customary, the son always had a governess, a so-called 'Fräulein.' The father frequently changed them—a fact repeatedly mentioned by Norbert Elias in his biographical memories as something he had to deal with. He also did not go to a primary school, as we would say today. He had a private tutor, who taught the 'physically very delicate child'—

“I had all the childhood illnesses one could possibly have”<sup>4</sup>— at home in the three years of preschool. In 1903 it was still possible for Elias to be sent directly to the preschool of the local high school (the Johannes-Gymnasium) instead of the four-year elementary school. Pupils like him wore the college cap from the start and wrote with pencils into their exercise books instead of using slate pencils and slates. The teachers of the preschool, whose social status was lower than that of the high school teachers taking over from the Sexta (fifth grade), were allowed to have private pupils. Elias was educated by the class teacher of his preschool class. From the Sexta onwards, he had to participate in class at the high school.

The Johannes-Gymnasium had a large proportion of Jewish pupils. After Berlin and Frankfurt, Breslau had the third largest Jewish population.<sup>5</sup> Only few of Elias’s classmates survived the First World War. A former mate of his contacted the WDR (West German Broadcasting) in 1986, after having seen Ulrich Gemhardt’s film. Unfortunately, the 1896-born Alfred Wandrey only knew few details. He had hardly any contact with his Jewish classmates, “the Jewish families only associated amongst themselves”. After the war, he did not return to Breslau and never saw any of his classmates again. He could, however, recollect some interesting details. For instance, he could substantiate why the

4 Cited from the Interview with Arend-Jan Heerma van Voss and Bram van Stolk 1984. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 17, *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections*, Norbert Elias’s story of life, UCD 2013, pp. 71–140 (here: p. 73).

5 Cf. *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte*. Ed. by Deutsches Institut für Urbanistik. *Schwerpunktheft 1/1987: Juden und Stadt*.

Johannes-Gymnasium was attended by an especially high proportion of Jewish pupils and why it also employed a great number of Jewish teachers. It was an urban school. There were a couple of Jewish city councillors who belonged to the liberal party and could thus exercise influence in favour of their clientele.

In 1987 Walter Slowak got in touch with me. He and Elias had not been in the same class, but they had met in the pupils' gymnastics club, where Slowak was the treasurer. He told me that the Johannes-Gymnasium had been founded in 1872. As an interdenominational institution, it was meant to be a counterbalance to the public secondary schools, which were all linked to churches. After 1933, the National socialists closed down the Gymnasium, because it was "Jewified" ("verjudet")—to use the terminology of the time. The teachers and the pupils were then transferred to the high school Gymnasium "Am Zwinger".

According to Wandrey, who was a 'Primus' (the top pupil) in the lower class levels, Elias was quite a good pupil: "He sat in front of me". The system of the time not only issued grades at Easter and in autumn. It also disclosed rank numbers and thus determined the seating arrangements, which had the best pupils sit in the last row and the worst in the first. This means Elias must have been under the best ten pupils of the initially thirty pupils.

This shows that the 'feeble child' did well in school, after all. There, Judaism played no special role. As said, there were Jewish teachers, the religion classes were held by a rabbi. Nevertheless, the school was a German secondary school with an educational demand that was not only acknowledged by the Jews but also sought after and appreci-



**Figure 3** On the left, Sophie Elias, the mother; lying Norbert Elias, circa 10 years old

ated. Elias has pointed out the important influence of the Prussian-humanist Gymnasium in each biographical statement and talked about the strong creative stimuli he had gained there and which decisively determined his development.<sup>6</sup> He praised his excellent teachers, some of whom subsequently even had a career in academia.<sup>7</sup>

In the higher classes there was a working group where, above all, Kant was read. This actually brought about competition amongst the pupils, regarding the comprehension of the difficult texts. Intellectual curiosity was coupled with

6 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 6 f.

7 Loc. cit., p. 7.

the realization that it would take hard intellectual labour to assert oneself against the matter and the rivals. It was no coincidence that the pupil Elias was in particular intrigued by the philosophy class. The in-depth study of philosophy was at the same time the in-depth study of the ‘classic educational ideal of the German bourgeoisie’ ... Still in its focus stood the classical authors of the Greek-Roman antiquity and the German “age of Schiller- and Goethe-era”.<sup>8</sup> In keeping with the spirit of said educational ideal, the thirteen-year-old Elias hoped to receive the German classics in the edition of the Bibliographisches Institut for his Bar Mitzwah (the Jewish counterpart to the Confirmation or Communion).

In his “Notes”, Elias identified this early orientation towards the classic German literature as being responsible for his scientific approach to human problems. This remained a fixed component of his personality when he later turned to sociology and took “an increasingly critical view of the specific humanism of the idealist trend in philosophy”.<sup>9</sup>

But this development did not commence until fifteen years later. Initially, childhood and the school years showed the typical characteristics of a youth in a German-Jewish middle-class family. One is almost tempted to say that they were a typical parvenu family, who was aware of their Jewishness but thought of themselves as a German family. Elias has repeatedly described how pervasive the orientation towards the German society was—irrespective of its defensive-hostile attitudes. This defence was not taken seriously but

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.



rather brushed aside as an immature attitude of uneducated people. “The image that comes back to me from my childhood is that of an outsider society which tried to conceal from itself much of its social inequality and ostracisation in view of its legal and thus its economic equality. The image of the dirty, cheating Jewish pedlar, mumbling in Yiddish and smelling of garlic, which we met with over and over again in Christian German society, was too far removed from what we knew about ourselves to be a serious affront. We lived in a somewhat encapsulated world. Thus it was easy to dismiss the occasional public outburst of hatred against Jews as a misdemeanour of uneducated hooligans”.<sup>10</sup> This was an outsider’s position which, under “the protection of the legal institutions of the Reich and the thoroughly secure life we led physically, economically and culturally”, could only be perceived “as if through a veil”.<sup>11</sup>

The family’s feeling was shared with the major part of Jews. In the era of the German Empire, “the integration of the Jews into the German society was no longer a theoretical but now a de facto matter”. It was accomplished so rapidly and widely “because it was part of a larger phenomenon, the emancipation of the middle class”.<sup>12</sup> In this respect, Jews’ Germanness was not an attempt of fearful assimilation but the “feeling of participation in a culture that brought forth humanists and cosmopolitans, like Kant, Schiller and Goethe”.<sup>13</sup> The fascination and the intellec-

10 Loc. cit., p. 46.

11 Ibid.

12 Peter Gay: *Freud, Juden und andere Deutsche. Herren und Opfer in der modernen Kultur*. Hamburg 1986, p. 118.

13 Loc. cit., p. 117.

tual challenge, which Immanuel Kant's philosophy elicited in the high school student Norbert Elias, had an equivalent in the surrounding society. Jürgen Habermas explained Kant's attraction on the Jewish spirit by referring to the latter's "critique based on a belief in reason and cosmopolitan humanitarianism" and the opportunities Kant granted for an "assimilation without insult".<sup>14</sup> Therefore, it cannot surprise that the 'Allgemeine Zeitung des Judentums', which had then been published for more than 50 years, already in 1890 labelled itself a "German organ devoted to the emperor and the empire". This was a devotion to the German society which believed to know insulting rejection only from past events.

The equivalent can be found in Elias's biography, in particular in the context of his parents. In 1938, when their son had already been living in exile for five years, his parents were able to visit him in London. He asked them to remain with him, but the father declined on the grounds that he did nothing wrong. This was the consciousness of a man who "had grown up in a state that he himself viewed as a constitutional state under whose protection thoroughly straightforward and honest men, sometimes rise".<sup>15</sup> He had good reasons for his assumption, but he was horribly mistaken. The Jews had, as Walter Jens stated in his speech on Lessing's "Nathan aus der Sicht von Auschwitz",<sup>16</sup> sacrificed their

14 Jürgen Habermas: *Der deutsche Idealismus der jüdischen Philosophen*. In: Thilo Koch (ed.): *Portraits zur deutsch-jüdischen Geistesgeschichte*. Köln 1961, pp. 99–125 (here: p. 106).

15 Norbert Elias: *Notes on a lifetime*, p. 46.

16 Walter Jens: *Nathan der Weise aus der Sicht von Auschwitz. Juden und Christen in Deutschland*. In: id.: *Kanzel und Katheder. Reden*. München 1984, pp. 31–49.

identity for the thought of equality, full of confidence for the presumed humanism of the other side. It is the history of a misconception with fatal consequences.

## **Contours of Personality: Self-Discipline and Intellectual Labour**

**A**t the end of his childhood and school days, we see a young person who was able to grow up well-protected and who, at an early stage, set out to become a ‘*homme de lettres*’. It hardly comes as a surprise now that it had already been decided during his school days that he would go to university and would seek a career in academia—even though he was well aware of the fact that for him, as a Jewish outsider, it would be difficult to obtain a professorship. This was neither a blind mechanism nor a blind coincidence. One could name several factors which influenced this development and which laid the foundation stone for a certain personality.

A decisive turning point in the life of Elias was the experience of the First World War, which had torn the not-yet-nineteen-year-old from the intact Breslau world. After having passed the school-leaving examination on 8 June 1915 and having enrolled in philosophy and German studies at the University of Breslau (today: Wrocław) on 22 June, he, like his all his classmates, reported for voluntary military duty on 1 July 1915. Initially, Elias was deployed as a telegrapher in the East, and then he took part in the Battle of the Somme with its immense loss of life. After a breakdown, he was returned home and, no longer suitable for field duty,

he worked as a medical orderly in the 'Genesenden-Batterie des Ersatz-Bataillons Fußartillerie Regiment 6. Parallel he began to study medicine and was discharged from military service on 4 February 1919.<sup>17</sup>

The trench war remained a terrible memory. In an interview with Carmen Thomas, one of the rare opportunities when he commented on his wartime experiences, he said: "The dirt, the morass, the blood, the dying horses, the comrades dying close by, the barrage fire. I can vividly remember the scene when the war front moved nearer. We heard the incessant hollow thunder of barrage day and night; we saw the flashes of the guns. The comrade next to me played the harmonica, and we sang 'Ich hatte einen Kameraden'".<sup>18</sup>

Elias extricated himself unscathed from this war. Most of his classmates were killed on the so-called 'field of honour'. This was a main reason, as Alfred Wandrey assumed, for the fact that no reunion with the classmates took place after the war. Wandrey, like Elias, was able to name some of those killed in action but none of the survivors.

Elias not only extricated himself physically but also mentally unscathed. One could even say that he escaped strengthened in a certain way, despite the traumatic experiences of the inferno. The delicate young person dealt with the shock of the sudden transition from a protected youth to the military service, as well as with the physical efforts

17 All information on the military service and the data of the medical studies can be found in his curriculum vitae, which Elias had handed in at the Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Frankfurt and which are kept in the university archive. In the following, it will be referred to as the 'Frankfurter Lebenslauf'.

18 In the interview with Carmen Thomas.

and psychological strains, by developing a particular facility for self-discipline. One can only cope with the surrounding conditions, this was the early realisation, when one learns to live disciplined, lowers the demands and, bodily as well as mentally, adapts to the surroundings. This was an ability from which he benefitted in the long years in exile and in the pursuit of his economic interests.

Slowly the personality of young Elias began to take shape. The Jewish parental home, the humanistic education, the will to hard intellectual labour and the insight of the necessity for self-discipline only partially outline these contours, but they provide information concerning the principal orientation. In the next years—the period of study—more ‘components’ were added.

Elias started his medical studies at the request of his father. The latter had also attended a high school “but did not have the money to study and become a physician. It was actually his ideal, he had wanted to become a physician”.<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, Elias was enrolled for the subject that had fascinated him so much in school: philosophy. For a while, both studies ran in parallel. But after the medical preliminary examination (Physikum) on 14 April 1919, little by little, Elias gave up the medical studies and fully concentrated on the studies in philosophy, with the aim of a doctorate.

The preclinical semester up to the Physikum, which, at the time, had a focus on the natural sciences and anatomy, provided Elias with considerable knowledge about the natural sciences, which affected his subsequent work. In connection with studies on the problems of laughter and smile

19 In the interview with Carmen Thomas.

ing, he reports in the “Notes”, it was the knowledge he had gained during his years of medical studies which enabled him to consider social and biological aspects as well as relate these to each other. “I knew of the unique diversity of the musculature of the human face, observed how much more complex this musculature was than that of existing humanoid apes—how much more developed is, for example, the risorius muscle, which plays quite an important part in human laughter. From this side too, therefore, I was made aware that human beings are by nature attuned to living together with their own kind, to species-specific forms of communication, which, partly if not exclusively, may be and must be activated and transformed by the assimilation of learned social patterns. By this piece of work I wanted to show, among other things, that the extraordinary individualization of the human face—especially when compared to the relative rigidity and far lower individual differentiation of animal faces—resulted partly from the special malleability and variety of the human facial muscles”.<sup>20</sup>

## **Elias and Richard Hönigswald: The Conflict with the Doctoral Supervisor**

**T**he preclinical semester and the preliminary studies of anatomy had an important influence on Elias’s fundamental concepts. It was not until much later that he realized how important this natural scientific knowledge was for the development of the civilization theory. This primar-

20 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, pp. 8 f.

ily affected the recognition that the human being does not live from the inside to the outside, that, for instance, emotions are not only the trigger for certain muscle movements in the face. Facial expressions and emotions “are originally aspects of one and the same human reaction. Feeling and expression belong primarily together”. The ‘I’ does not exist isolated from other human beings, as in a sense imprisoned in the body. It is only in the course of the civilization process that an artificial separation occurs, “depending on the prevailing patterns of civilisation, does a diving wall become inserted between emotive excitement and gestures or movements of the facial muscles”. For Elias, it is doubtful whether he would have been capable of clearly working out this “new image of homo-non-clausus (sive sociologous)” and whether he could have further developed it later on, if he was “without the knowledge [he] acquired during [the] study of medicine”.<sup>21</sup> However, it took more than 15 years until these insights concretized. Initially, he began studying philosophy with the Neo-Kantian Hönigswald.

Richard Hönigswald (1875–1947) did not belong to either of the two great schools (Marburg, Southern Germany) of Neo-Kantianism which wanted to exclusively establish the validity of scientific cognition based on a transtemporal and supra-individual subjectivity. Hönigswald, in contrast, insisted that cognition is always knowledge of fact. Therefore, the plain principles of validity which determine the possibility of scientific cognition as well as the supra-individual subjectivity are accompanied by a concrete subjectivity—even though this does not have to be exclusively conveyed

21 Loc. cit., pp. 9f.

in a scientific manner but can also be situated in the field of psychological or religious emotions. With this, Hönigswald provides a holistic approach that comprised philosophy, psychology, art, ethics and religion. The laws and structures of these sciences are included as prerequisites for the possibility of cognition, so that philosophy leads to terms that are *letzt-definiert* (conclusively defined). Hönigswald classified these meta-theoretical deliberations into a fundamental theory. Distinctions based on single disciplines or parts of philosophy can be omitted. The analysis of historic forms of philosophy examines the internal arrangement of unvarying basic principles of cognition. Problems and an understanding of the problem may change historically, but the principle of cognition, here in Hönigswald's version, remains unchanged.

Apart from Breslau, in the summer semester of 1919 Elias studied in Heidelberg and in the summer semester of 1920 in Freiburg. As a young student, he was allowed to participate in Husserl's 'Goethe Seminar' in Freiburg. Husserl's assistant Edith Stein<sup>22</sup>—she had known Elias from the Jewish circles in Breslau—had arranged the access to the seminar through a letter of recommendation.

Elias, having been forewarned by Hönigswald, had a critical attitude towards the phenomenology of Husserl. This is most likely the reason why Edith Stein sent a preventative letter to Freiburg: "A young man just went from here

22 Edith Stein was a pupil of Husserl's, who later converted to Catholicism, was abducted from a monastery by Nazi henchmen and killed in a concentration camp. She was a woman of deep faith, a role model and a martyr, who was beatified in May 1897 and canonized in 1998 by Pope John Paul II.



to Freiburg to attend lectures by Husserl, and I have promised him to recommend him to you, what I should have already done. His name is Norbert Elias (he can be recognized by a blue-white badge!), his main or secondary profession is physician, philosophically drilled by Hönigswald but instructed by me that he needs to leave aside his criticism to actually understand phenomenology”.<sup>23</sup>

It can no longer be determined whether Heidelberg was chosen because some important Neokantians were teaching there, because a congress of Jewish student fraternities took place there in summer and was attended by Elias as a delegate of the Wanderbund Blau-Weiß (a hiking association), or whether the city exerted its often-praised powers of attraction on Elias, too. In any case, he attended the lectures by Heinrich Rickert, Ernst Robert Curtius and Friedrich Gundolf. He also took part in the seminar held by the young Jaspers, who took an interest in this student. Elias remembers the long joint walks on the ‘Philosophenweg’. This beautiful path—lying on the riverside opposite the castle—deserves the name ‘philosophers’ walk’: with reasonable certainty it has seen all the great scholars who have studied, taught or lived in Heidelberg.

Jaspers initiated Elias to give a presentation on the “Zivilisationsliteraten” in his seminar. The term ‘civilization literatus’ had been used by Thomas Mann as both a catchword and a swearword aimed at his brother Heinrich and other leftist authors whose radical democratic views were considered un-German. It was in particular the term ‘civilization’

23 Edith Stein: *Selbstbildnis in Briefen*. Erster Teil: 1916–1934. Edith Steins Werke, Vol. VII. Freiburg u.a. 1976, p. 46.

that was supposed to be the negative counterpart to ‘culture’. Culture is German, natural and veracious; civilization is foreign, soulless and disintegrating.

Elias did not think much of politics until then: “models of political commitment were virtually absent from the circles of my parents and relations”.<sup>24</sup> This distance to politics was not changed by the war and his temporary membership in the council of soldiers “to which I was dispatched by my unit in 1918, probably because of my articulateness”.<sup>25</sup> Early on, he had adopted a relatively distanced position towards politics as a central social sphere; this position we will encounter time and again in the subsequent decades. He took up the topic of his term paper—the contrast between civilization and culture—in his introductory section of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”, this time not with a political perspective but in order to examine the historic roots of the terms and the development of their contrast.

During his studies in philosophy, Elias was soon confronted with the contrast between the philosophical, idealist and the anatomical, physiological conceptions of the human which he had learnt about during his medical studies. He was perturbed by his inability to reconcile the functioning of the brain with the perceptions of the human’s inner world as an a priori given sphere of ideas. One day, when expressing such concerns to his teacher Hönigswald, he was reminded of the “of the insufficiency of biologism and the validity of judgments”.<sup>26</sup>

24 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 12.

25 Ibid.

26 Loc. cit., pp. 11.

But it just so happens with doubt. Once born, it cannot be easily eradicated, even by the immunization strategies of the questioned position. Here the doubt is directed against the basic orientation of philosophy to reduce processes to static conditions and to subject them to timeless, a priori present criteria meant to justify the validity of the judgments.

It is for this reason that a fundamental dispute over the dissertation text “Idee und Individuum. Ein Beitrag zur Philosophie der Geschichte” (‘Idea and Individual. A contribution to the philosophy of history’) arose between him and his strict doctoral supervisor. In this context, Elias demonstrated that “the whole idea of a priori truth did not hold water”. “I could no longer ignore the fact that all that Kant regarded as timeless and as given prior to all experience, whether it be the idea of causal connections or of time or of natural and moral laws, together with the words that went with them, had to be learned from other people in order to be present in the consciousness of the individual human being. As acquired knowledge they therefore formed part of a person’s store of experiences”.<sup>27</sup>

Hönigswald could not accept that. Complying with the then predominant authoritarian doctoral-supervisor-candidate-relationship, he categorically demanded an alteration. Despite his opposite comprehension, the candidate eventually accepted some of the alterations and omitted a few of the pages, as has been noted in the faculty’s copy—thereupon and with the addition of the remark that “the idea of the validity as a principle of the dialectical process is exempt

27 Loc. cit., p. 13.

from the movement of that process”,<sup>28</sup> he eventually satisfied Hönigswald.

After the oral examination (*Rigorosum*) in philosophy, psychology, art history and chemistry had taken place on 26 June 1922, Elias earned his doctoral degree in philosophy on 30 January 1924.

One copy of the dissertation text can be found in the Prussian State Library in Berlin, alongside with a three-page extract that, due to the economic crises of 1922/23, had been considered sufficient as a publication of the dissertation.<sup>29</sup> When Elias reencountered his text in the early 1980s—that is sixty years later—through the mediation by Peter Ludes, he suffered “a certain shock”, as he reported in a footnote to the “Notes”.<sup>30</sup> If one knows (and values) the clear language in which Elias had written his sociological texts since the mid-1930s, this is quite understandable. The 1922 text is philosophically encoded, full of abstractions and strongly ritualized. Nevertheless, even in this short text, one can detect the topics Elias would later address as a sociologist. “As early as my dissertation, therefore, I had been puzzling over what I later called a ‘sequential order’, the specific order within which a later event arises from a specific sequence of earlier events. At that time I was wondering about questions that are still of the utmost interest to me today—for example, the question of how a later form of state emerges from an earlier

28 Norbert Elias: *Idea and individual. A contribution to the philosophy of history* (1924). In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 1, UCD 2005, pp. 55–57 (here: p. 57).

29 The libraries of the Ruhr-University Bochum and the Comprehensive University Wuppertal have one photocopy of the dissertation text and the extract.

30 Norbert Elias: *Notes on a lifetime*, loc. cit., p. 301.

# Idee und Individuum.

Ein Beitrag zur Philosophie der Geschichte.

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Auszug aus einer Schrift

zur

**Erlangung der Doktorwürde**

der

Hohen Philosophischen Fakultät der  
Schles. Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität  
zu Breslau

vorgelegt von

**Norbert Elias.**

Promotion: 30. Januar 1924.



HOCHSCHULVERLAG BRESLAU

Schles.Buchdruckerei u. Verlag Karl Vater, Breslau 10, Matthiasstr. 12.

Figure 4 Cover page of the three-page extract from the doctoral thesis

one which in turn emerges from a yet earlier one, and why it is the case; or how a later economic form arises from an earlier one, a later form of knowledge from earlier ones and, more generally, how later forms of human social life emerge from earlier ones<sup>31</sup>

The young student had stood up for his insights and had withstood the dispute with someone more powerful. It was an important, a guiding experience for the young person that the probity of thought can lead to new findings—an experience which became another important component of his personality. Added to the readiness to hard intellectual labour and to the self-discipline was the will to hang on to that which he thought right, even if disadvantages might arise from the human interconnections in which one is located or if for a long time there might be no chance to be appropriately heard.

## **Jewish Youth Movement: The Wanderbund Blau-Weiß**

**T**he differences to Hönigwald's position can be read off, even more pronounced than in the dissertation text, of a twelve-page contribution, published by published in mid-1921 in the journal for the leaders of the Jewish 'Wanderbund Blau-Weiß' (the then most important Jewish youth organization).<sup>32</sup>

31 Ibid.

32 Norbert Elias: On seeing in nature (1921). In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, Early Writing, UCD 2005, pp. 5–21 (here: p. 10).

The fact that, shortly after the turn of the century, there existed Jewish associations alongside the 'Wandervogel', had something to do with the partly latent, partly explicit anti-semitism of the German youth movement. Jewish boys and girls were not often accepted as members, others were from the outset deterred by such incidents. Since both the Jewish and the Christian adolescents preferred to go on weekend excursions into the woods with kindred spirits, rather than suffer the bourgeois weekend and Sunday ritual well-behaved and well-dressed, the formation of substitute associations was bound to happen.

Already in 1907, Jewish hiking associations were founded in Breslau and Berlin. These were not the only ones, but they were the core of the most important Jewish youth movement organizations. Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer has rightly stated that these, like in the case of the Wandervogel, were by no means spontaneous foundations by youngsters but organized by, at most youthful, adults.<sup>33</sup> It is not clear from the literature to what extent a Zionist element existed from the outset. It is clear, however, that the foundation of a youth department of the Jewish hiking association in 1907 took up the Zionist colours blue and white in its name and that it was directed against the assimilation-oriented attitude of the German Judaism. The Jewish Wanderbund Blau-Weiß was meant as an alternative programme to the Jewish-German associations and organisations. It was a community committed to Zionism, a circumstance that was soon exposed to severe criticism by the emphatically German Jews.

33 Hermann Meier-Cronemeyer: *Jüdische Jugendbewegung*. In: *Germania Judaica VIII* (1969), pp. 1–56 und pp. 57–124 (here: p. 18).

The discussion of this subject was continued during the world war, albeit with reduced vehemence. Very soon after the end of the war, Blau-Weiß displayed intensified activities, now fully concentrated on the support of the Zionist movement and the colonization of Palestine. Georg Landauer wrote about this: “We have to see it as our duty to strengthen the movement with conscious work, encourage existent beginnings, and create new conditions for the Zionist life and development of Palestine wherever we are”.<sup>34</sup>

But the Zionist association Blau-Weiß was also a youth federation obliged to pedagogic goals of the youth movement. Questions of education had a high priority. It was the Breslau leader Martin Bandmann, who had published an essay on the “Gedanken zur Kunsterziehung”. This was a current trend then the proletarian-agrarian tendency, which had partly captured the Zionism of the time. Education, and here art education was the centrepiece, had a high priority in the academic variant of the movement. This resulted in an autonomy that was to be “connected to the legality of the great Zionist movements into one insight”.<sup>35</sup>

Elias had already worked for the Wanderbund Blau-Weiß during his school days and during the war, as a report about a tour into the Giant Mountains documented.<sup>36</sup> After the

34 George Landauer quoted in Hans Tramer: Jüdischer Wanderbund Blau-Weiß. Ein Beitrag zu seiner äußeren Geschichte. In: Bulletin des Leo Baeck Instituts V (1962), pp. 23–43 (here: p. 34).

35 Martin Bandmann: Gedanken zur Kunsterziehung. In: Blau-Weiß-Blätter. Führerzeitung. Herausgegeben von der Bundesleitung der Jüdischen Wanderbünde Blau-Weiß II (1920), H. 112, p. 218.

36 Norbert Elias: Three-day excursion to the Riesengebirge (1914). In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, Early Writings, UCD 2005, pp. 3–4.



end of the war, he became active there. The 'Blau-Weiß-Blätter' of November 1918 stated in the report of the federal administration in Breslau: "Norbert Elias has been appointed as leader".<sup>37</sup> From the outset, Breslau had been one of the centres of the Jewish hiking association. There, Martin Bandmann assumed the editorship of the leaders' journal; later, he also became its federal leader. Under his patronage, the so-called 'Breslauer Heft' was published; it was dedicated to questions of education and gives testimony to the range of the discussion of the time.<sup>38</sup>

## **"Vom Sehen in der Natur": On the Critique of Philosophy**

**T**he already mentioned treatise "Vom Sehen in der Natur" ('On seeing in nature') was published in the 'Breslauer Heft' of 1921. It does not contain much Zionist ideology, this is to be said in advance, and it is also lacking passages having the charisma of a Bandmann. Sometimes one wonders that these Eliasian statements had been incorporated at all. Sentences like "where there is education, there are questions asked" had to be quite a contrast from Bandmann's Zionist concepts, which strongly aimed at allegiance and dedication and which were agreed on at the nationwide meeting, the Bundestag of the Jewish Wanderbund Blau-Weiß in Prunn.

37 In: Blau-Weiß-Blätter. Monatsschrift für Jüdisches Jugendwandern VI (1918), Novemberheft, p. 79.

38 For more details on this, see: Hermann Korte: Elias und der jüdische Wanderbund Blau-Weiß. In id.: Biographische Skizzen zu Norbert Elias. Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 75–84.

It is interesting that though the 'Breslauer Heft' was referred to quite often, it was not quoted. The name Elias is not mentioned in the reports on Blau-Weiß. This might also be one of the reasons why the article had remained undiscovered for such a long time. It may have meant little for the Jewish youth movement, but, with regard to the intellectual development and the future career of its author, the article was very important.

This, however, does not mean that the youth movement has shaped him. When Helmut Schelsky in his Bloch book aligns Elias with the sociologists who were influenced by the youth movement,<sup>39</sup> this is a generalized attribution and not supported by any sources. Apart from the fact that it certainly made a difference for the future career, whether one had been affected by free-German-antisemitic or Jewish-Zionist mind-set, there are no indications in the case of Elias compared to those one can discern, for instance, in Hans Freyer.<sup>40</sup> The later had no objections, even after the assumption of power by the national socialists, to becoming the president of the German Sociological Association.

The article "Vom Sehen in der Natur" ('On seeing in nature') is in an amazing way a first document of the scientific development of Norbert Elias from philosopher to human scientist. Many of his theses and positions, which were later

39 Helmut Schelsky: *Die Hoffnung Blochs. Kritik der marxistischen Existenzphilosophie eines Jugendbewegten*. Stuttgart 1979, p. 10.

40 For this, see Elfriede Üner: *Jugendbewegung und Soziologie. Wissenschaftssoziologische Skizzen zu Hans Freyers Werk und Wissenschaftsgemeinschaft bis 1933*. In: M. Rainer Lepsius (ed.): *Soziologie in Deutschland und Österreich 1918–1945. Materialien zur Entwicklung, Emigration und Wirkungsgeschichte* (special issue 23 of the KZfSS). Opladen 1981, pp. 131–159.

presented on a more developed level, found first manifestations here. Even if one does not exegetically interpret word by word but merely names the most apparent issues, there is clear evidence for this proposition. To name just one example, it already starts with the title ('On seeing in nature') which places the observer 'in' a connection with nature. The article does not talk 'about the seeing of nature' but 'in nature'. With this Elias marks an important difference. The text then reads: seeing in "nature is a far from simple matter, since it is intimately bound up with how we see ourselves and the world in general".<sup>41</sup>

One does not face the world as a completely finalized individual; one belongs into it, and one has to consider and process this fact intellectually. This is a significant difference to Richard Höningwald's monad theory, which determines that it is the concrete subjects left to their own devices who are able to recognize. In general, Elias turned away from the metaphysics in this early article. This is most clearly emphasized in the thesis that only scientifically proven statements have a purpose.<sup>42</sup> Höningwald also accepted transcendent statements. They were objects of reflection on their significance for cognition but have not been examined scientifically.

Whilst reading, it becomes clear that Elias did abandon the metaphysical part of Neokantianism but not the orientation towards a strict method, where the emphasis on the process of knowledge creation, the significance of the

41 Norbert Elias: On seeing in nature, loc. cit., p. 10.

42 Cf. loc. cit.

# BLAU-WEISS-BLÄTTER

FÜHRERZEITUNG

HERAUSGEGEBEN VON DER

BUNDESLEITUNG D. JÜDISCHEN WANDERBÜNDE BLAU WEISS

Mai-Juli 1921 • Jahrg. II des Führerheftes • Heft 8—10

## BRESLAUER

## HEFT

### Vom Sehen in der Natur.

Indes mich wandernd durch die Weiten  
Des Seins Unendlichkeit ergreift,  
Indes mein Geist Vergangenheiten  
Und Zukunft augenblicks durchschweifft

Kint sich das unermessne Viele  
Der Schmelzen ungehör'ger Schwall  
Gebändigt zu dem einen Ziele  
Aus allen Dingen wird das All.

Da spür ich Leben rings empfinden  
Von neuem Atem Feld und Wald  
Und alles Ferne will sich nahen  
Und alles Nabe' stimmt Gestalt.

Das aber ist des Wunders Fülle  
Wie Eines sich in Alles zweigt  
Aus Rätsels Haft gelöster Halle  
Ein neues Rätsel fruchtbar steigt.

I. Das Sehen in der Natur scheint im Grunde die einfachste Sache von der Welt zu sein: man freut sich wandern des Wechsels der Landschaft, man steigt auf die Berge und genießt die schöne Aussicht. Und so sehr die Kunst nach sorgsamster Arbeit in allen Einzelheiten verlangt, um sehen zu können, so unmittelbar und mühelos scheint die Landschaft ihre Schönheit dem Auge zu erschließen. Trotz dieser Unterschiede hat das Werk der Malerei mit dem Landschaftsbilde vielerlei gemein; nicht unrichtigerweise bezeichnen wir beides als Bild, denn hier, wie dort steht ein betrachtendes Ich einem als selbst zu Beurteilendem gegenüber. Aber während bei einem Gemälde ohne weiteres einsichtig ist, aus welchen Gründen das eine Dargestellte: der Baum, der Mensch oder das Gebäude sich mit dem andern zu einem unzerstörten Ganzen zusammen schließt, da es ja die Phantasie eines Künstlers so fügte, ist vom Landschaftsbilde eigentlich garnicht verständlich, wie es komme, daß Baum und Fels, Wiese und Berg und Straße und Dorf sich ebenfalls zu einer bildhaften Einheit ergänzen, ja, was noch wunderbarer ist, daß es gar keine schlechten ungeschulten Landschaft gibt, während wir doch unzählige Bilder, denen diese Einheit unmöglich als wertlos verdammen müssen.

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Figure 5 First page of the essay "Vom Sehen in der Natur" ('On seeing in nature')

method of operation which is now replaced by transcendental questions, is considered useful and viable.

One can therefore determine that the abandonment of metaphysical science, i.e. philosophy, which had already been apparent here, is connected with the focusing on an objective, empirical science, whose aim is to develop scientific benchmarks to assess problems. “To learn to see nature therefore means nothing other than to recognise areas which raise questions, and to evaluate or solve the questions with the theory of the relevant science”<sup>43</sup>

Some parts of the 1921 text sounds positivist, but this cannot give reason to suspect in it the same positivist fundamental orientations which are today inherent in the conceptions of a united science.

The scientific process as such only attains meaning in connection with the Enlightenment, which aimed at improving the understanding of the world in which humans are living. This is not a purely technical-economically oriented enterprise since it is integrated in comprehensive examinations of cultural manifestations of society.

This also becomes obvious where Elias addresses problems of historic development and, with them, develops a new topic against Höningwald and Neokantianism. Though one can concede that Kant’s philosophy of history considers possible, and maybe even necessary, an approach based on an empirically oriented science of history. Taking up this still original option, Elias breaks away from philosophical thinking by asking subject-specific questions—here, by asking for the historicity of seeing in nature. His conclusion that

43 Loc. cit., p. 15.

the Greeks had a different understanding of nature and that a structured development can be documented from Renaissance to the present is diametrically opposed to the ahistorical thinking of his philosophy teacher.

With the reference to long-term developments of certain perceptual, behavioural and valuations patterns, Elias had eventually found his theme of life. It is certainly an initially fragmentary approach he formulated then, but the ground for later questions—including that for the development of consciousness—had already been prepared here. His fundamental attitude, which led him away from the abstract metaphysics as well as from relativist and personified historiography, can already be recognized. The text reads as follows:

“There is always a danger in historical investigations, that researchers will either wrongly take themselves and their own world as the basis of the earlier one, or conversely, on encountering something alien and unfamiliar, will prematurely break all bridges with the past and declare all understandings impossible. However, careful appraisal of precisely what is unfamiliar might bring to light much useful material”.<sup>44</sup>

We will meet this approach to history again and again: at the Congress of Sociology in Zurich, in Elias’ postdoctoral thesis, and, finally, in the central study “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” (‘On the Process of Civilisation’). This also applies to the topic nature and experience of nature, which time and again re-emerges as an example, albeit on higher synthesis levels and in more advanced theoretical statements. Knowledge and resources are still missing in this

44 Loc. cit., p. 10.

first approach, dating from 1921. Throughout the process of the emergence of his process theory, he acquired historical, sociological and psychological proficiency and instruments with which he was able to work out the reasons for long-term changes and the reasons for definable phases of societal development.

Already, back then, Elias had clear conceptions of the necessary conditions. The more correct answers to questions can only be found by those who are eager to promote the progress of neighbouring sciences, by those who, “who by diligent study has become familiar with the foundations of science and its cumulative results”.<sup>45</sup> We are going to meet this attitude, too, again and again.

## **“Passing the Torch from Hand to Hand”**

**I**n the early article “Vom Sehen in der Natur” (‘On seeing in nature’) we find not only the already laid-out scientific topic and the scientific attitude that affected Elias’s future life, but also the motto under which it was placed. Here, the influence of the philosophy teacher and doctoral supervisor Hönigswald are unmistakable. Already the orientation towards others, actually towards all other sciences, finds an equivalent in Hönigswald’s system of all areas of application, his plea for the wholeness of scientific questioning. Even more, the influence of Hönigswald’s pedagogical approach can be detected—not only in the sense that educators are bearers of culture. It can also be recognized in

45 Loc. cit., pp. 14 f.

the comprehensive entitlement to education, which finds expression in Elias in a humanity-education consciousness, albeit in a more taken-back form, i.e. without a 'people-educating' impetus or salvational affectations. The motto, his life motto, is placed under the text: "Iampadia echontes didadosusin allelois";<sup>46</sup> in English: passing the torch from hand to hand. This motto also contains the image of a chain in which the light is passed on.

Elias remained true to the motto and to this image. Furthermore, one also encounters it time and again when following his scientific life. This is most clearly expressed 66 years later, in the acceptance speech for the Adorno Award: "Work in the human sciences, as in other sciences, is a torch race: we take over the torch from the preceding generations, carry it a distance further and hand it over to the following generation, so that it can go beyond us. The work of the preceding generations is not abolished by this; it is the precondition of the ability of later generations to go beyond it. [...] I should like my example to give coming generations the courage to combine awareness of the continuity of their own lives with the strength and boldness that are needed for innovation. For the discipline of thinking for themselves, for going beyond the older generations".<sup>47</sup>

What Elias wrote in the 'Breslauer Heft' was not a superimposed theory but had its equivalent in the youth work of the Breslau Wanderbund Blau-Weiß and apparently extend-

46 Loc. cit., p. 21.

47 Norbert Elias: Address on Adorno: respect and critique. In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 16, Essays III: On sociology and the humanities, UCD 2009, pp. 82–92 (here: pp. 91 f.).



ing even beyond this. I have the corresponding statements of a contemporary.

When Elias received the Theodor W. Adorno Award in 1977, which for the first time generated highest publicity for him, some people got in touch, who knew him from youth and student days, among them Dr Ernst Marcowicz from Israel. He knew Elias from Breslau and through their membership in the Jewish youth movement during the time after the First World War.

In Breslau, Marcowicz was a member of the national-German association of the ‘comrades’, but as one of their leaders came into contact with the ‘blue-white’ Elias. He shared many interests with him, in particular the inclination to philosophy and the interest in educational questions. As Marcowicz told me in a letter dating from 23 September 1978, he had learnt much from Elias, who had been one of the “most significant leaders of the Breslau Blau-Weiß”, and from the other Blau-Weiß leader Martin Bandmann. A lasting impression left him with the principle “not to merely drag boys and girls through nature and have them sing beautiful songs, but to ‘objectively’ connect them with nature, have them become familiar with flowers and trees, not as ‘school lesson’ rather, more vividly, on the basis of the plants and trees and birds one encounters during hiking, but also the special character of cities and villages, cultural problems, linguistic etc. This extended as far as saying that Blau-Weiß called itself ‘Zionist’, but it was ‘de facto’ more German than even the German hiking associations”.<sup>48</sup>

48 Since 2011 the original letter is located in the German Literature Archive in Marbach. See also Ernst Marcowicz: Die Kameraden. In: Jüdische Rundschau 1932. No 45/46.

Here we can already find the very view on ideological contents from which Elias did not completely distance himself, but he focuses his commitment primarily on the factual contents and scientific questions. This remained typical for him, as was the pedagogical principle not to educate but to encourage independence and thus contribute to self-formation. This principle happens in accordance with the Neokantian pedagogy of Paul Natorp, who understood “teaching and learning ... not as ‘implanting’ from the outside and as ‘passive acceptance’”, but for whom “the principle of independence” determines “learning as assistance to valid activation”.<sup>49</sup>

In any case, this distanced attitude towards ideological contents and the pedagogic, dialog-oriented principle resurfaced again in the subsequent phases of life. Becoming increasingly wiser was the goal, not to be content with the achievements and the ideologies. This also ties in with Marcowicz’s reporting at the end of his letter that he had planned to go to Palestine in 1923, but Elias had strongly recommended first completing the professional career and obtaining more experience. Not the devotion to an idea is what counts, but the intellectual and professional training, as thorough as possible, which would then enable finding an appropriate balance between commitment and dissociation.

49 Jörg Ruhloff: Paul Natorps Grundlegung der Pädagogik. Freiburg 1966, p. 142.

## From Philosophy to Sociology

At the end of his years of study, Elias had escaped the danger to ligate philosophical “idiom of thought, with its compulsory reduction of processes to states”,<sup>50</sup> as he notices with relief in the conclusion of the mentioned annotation in the “Notes” about the renewed encounter with his doctoral thesis. At the same time, however, his career in Breslau thus came to an end. The dispute with Hönigswald made a postdoctoral qualification (Habilitation) under his guidance unthinkable. It was already astonishing enough that he had consented to the doctorate, because the compromise character of the above-mentioned wording is so obvious that the appreciation for his teacher, which Elias felt until the end of his life, certainly also existed in reverse. At any rate, Elias changed both the location and the subject of his studies.

This twofold change—from philosophy to sociology and from Breslau to Heidelberg—was influenced by further circumstances, while one has to apprehend that ‘circumstances’ in this case also always means people and their interconnections. People make the circumstance—not vice versa. In the case of Elias, one fact has to be noted in particular: his activity in the industry. Besides the intellectual disappointment about philosophy—he could have turned towards the second major of his doctoral examination, the philosophy—, this constitutes an important reason for the reorientation in favour of sociology. It is already noticeable that the future scientific interest developed from two merging de-

50 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 303.

velopmental lines—firstly, from the torrent of personal experiences; secondly, from the questions whose existence or emergence influenced the subject.

After the doctoral examination on 26 June 1922, Elias could no longer count on the financial support from his parents. The inflation absorbed the pensions his father received for his savings. The son was therefore forced to earn a living for himself. Through mediation, he obtained a position in a factory which produced small iron parts (furnace hatches, valves etc.). The director, a Mr Mehrländer, had looked for an academic to be employed as junior manager, if possible with a doctoral degree. Elias was one.

He commenced his activities with an orientation trip through all departments of this medium-sized business, which, in Elias's memories, had had about 800 workers. Afterwards, he became the head of the export department. In this capacity he undertook, inter alia, an extended travel to Scandinavia, in order to recruit representatives and salesmen for the company. Working for the factory was a very important experience, helping him to break through the wall of the ivory tower, which, through his time as a soldier and the intra-academic disputes with his philosophy teacher, had already suffered major cracks. Added to the experience of the war was the misery of the working class during the economic crisis of 1922/23.

But he also made observations, which he subsequently turned into questions and then treated in the civilization theory. He discussed one of these observations in the "Notes". The director of the factory replied to his question regarding his motivation for constant commitment in a way which not only expressed personal joy in competition; it also

showed the interconnection with other competitors which he could not evade. The competitor figuration would take a central position in both the Civilization Theory and the “Höfische Gesellschaft”. This would still be some ten years, but the question was already there. The way to sociology is therefore understandable if not predestined.

When Elias quit his position in the industry to take up a university career, he went to Heidelberg, of which he still retained pleasant memories from his flying visit in the summer semester of 1919. For him, it was decided that he would become a university teacher, that research and teaching would be his future life content. This was the career he was striving for, for which he felt prepared. He had written a larger scientific study and knew that he has what it takes to be a good teacher, probably already was one. In his notes he writes: “I knew that I was a good teacher, among my fellow students I had acquired a reputation for being able to explain complicated subjects in a simple way”.<sup>51</sup>

At the end of this chapter, an episode shall be mentioned that, at the same time, constituted the final point of the life phase dealt with in this chapter. During his long travel as head of the export department to and within the Scandinavian countries, Elias whiled away the time, inter alia, by translating and retelling Greek anecdotes and jokes. He sent a small collection to the ‘Berliner Illustrierte’ which, to his surprise, published five of the funny stories in the 29<sup>th</sup> issue in July of 1924 and paid a small honorarium. For the ‘homme de lettres’ this was the signal for departure. He terminated his position in the ironware factory, the appeal of

51 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 15.

the new had already vanished, and headed off to Heidelberg. He did this knowing that he could earn money with writing (the economic relations had improved, so much that the father could come to the rescue if necessary) and while having the hope to build a university career. He arrived (probably) at the end of 1924<sup>52</sup> in the beautiful, old university town—intellectually, and in character, well prepared and “armed against dubious modes of thought”.<sup>53</sup> Childhood, youth and maturing time lay behind him. A new phase of life began.

52 There is no certainty regarding the exact point in time. Elias did not remember whether it was the end of 1924 or early 1925, and other sources also cannot substantiate the date. Since Elias always referred to the connection between the publication in the 'Berliner Illustrierten' and his decision to go to Heidelberg, and has related in the 'Frankfurter Lebenslauf' about the two-year activity in the industry, the “end of 1924” is the most obvious time specification.

53 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 14.

# Fifth Chapter

## Old Heidelberg, You Delicate

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Heidelberg was a good address for studying sociology, although not necessarily the first choice. In Berlin one could attend lectures by Ferdinand Tönnies and Alfred Vierkandt, Werner Sombart lectured socioeconomics there. In Cologne Leopold von Wiese did not yet have a school—it was not started until after 1945 under René König—but had established teaching and research that was based on himself and his teaching of relationship theory. Frankfurt, as well, was already interesting during the mid-1920s. Franz Oppenheimer, Albert Salomon and Walter Sulzbach taught there. Another opportunity would have been Münster where Wilhelm Plenge offered seminars.

Elias, who had hardly cared for sociology until then, did probably know little of all this. His choosing of Heidelberg was certainly rather related to his own positive experiences, in particular concerning the stimulating intellectual climate he got to know during his semester there. After all, a professorship for sociology existed in Heidelberg, which, since 1907, was held by Alfred Weber, brother of Max Weber who

had passed away in 1920. This has sometimes been overlooked, because most people first of all only associate Max Weber with the keywords sociology and Heidelberg. The latter had only shortly taught in Heidelberg. The contents of teaching were determined by Alfred Weber; he dissented on some central points and was even opposed to the views of his brother.

## **Max Weber and the Intellectual Climate**

**T**he importance of Max Weber for Heidelberg consisted in the impact on the intellectual climate. Appointed for a chair in Heidelberg in 1897, within only two years he already gave up his position due to illness and exhaustion and in 1903 abandoned his chair altogether. It was not until 1918, after the end of the First World War, that he resumed his professorship—initially in Vienna, then in Munich in 1919. A discussion group emerged around him, in the implementing of which he had been very interested, since it created a kind of “surrogate public” for him. “The importance of the discussion group ... in Heidelberg, cannot be overstated for the emergence of the ‘classic’ Max Weber. In the house of Weber, there was an opportunity for discussion almost each afternoon, and almost everyone in Heidelberg who was of distinction and mind participated. As from 1912, a weekly ‘jour fixe’ was arranged which could also be joined by students”.<sup>1</sup>

1 Dirk Käsler: Max Weber, loc. cit., p. 170.



Karl Jaspers gave an account of the central role Max Weber played during the discussions: “He talked thoroughly and substantially, ravishingly about the difficult problems. One could feel crushed by the superiority but at the same time be inspired by the factual and human demand of the man, who did not dress in any authority but seemed to enforce encounters on the same level”.<sup>2</sup>

But there were also other rounds of discussion; for example, a religion-scientific circle around Windelband, Jellinek and Troeltsch, which called itself ‘Eranos’, and a natural-scientific-philosophical ‘Janus’ with Curtius and Jaspers. “All these discussion groups, in which Max and Marianne Weber participated in a more or less regular manner, and most of all the meetings in the house of Weber, established and disseminated the ‘myth of Heidelberg’, as who Max Weber had already been regarded in his lifetime”.<sup>3</sup>

After the death of Max Weber, his widow continued the tradition with a salon, which soon became one of the centrepieces of Heidelberg university life. Admission to this salon was a prerequisite for young scholars in order to be accepted for a postdoctoral qualification. Elias, too, had to introduce himself—with a talk on “The Sociology of the Gothic”—before he was accepted as a postdoctoral fellow by Alfred Weber.

For the time being, this first information is enough to show that Alfred Weber remained in the shadow of his

2 Karl Jaspers: *Heidelberger Erinnerungen*. In: *Heidelberger Jahrbücher V*, ed. by the *Universitäts-Gesellschaft Heidelberg*, Berlin 1961, pp. 1–10 (here: p. 4).

3 Dirk Käsler: *Max Weber*, loc. cit., p. 171.

‘Über-Brüder’, even after his brother’s death”.<sup>4</sup> Beyond this, he did not play any major role in the disputes of German sociology on positions and contents in the Weimar period. In his investigation into the early German sociology, Käsler classified him as belonging to the “inner margin”.<sup>5</sup> When, in 1934, Earl Edward Eubank visited several German sociologists and questioned them, inter alia, for important colleagues, Alfred Weber was “not once” mentioned.<sup>6</sup> He was and remained the brother of the great Max. But he was successful and acclaimed as a teacher. Elias praised his liberality and tolerance. In the already mentioned radio interview with Reinhard Blomert, Richard Löwenthal called him a “terrific guy, tremendously vital and venturous”.

## **The Contrast of the Reference Persons: Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim**

**A**lfred Weber differed in some respects from his brother Max. I will highlight two points. Firstly, he had a more positive attitude towards the Weimar Republic and towards democracy. Max Weber was not exactly against it, but he saw in the new form of government first and foremost a stronger legitimization of state violence. In contrast, his Baden-liberal brother Alfred, who, in 1918, co-founded

4 For this, see also the chapter “Im Schatten des großen Bruders” in the article by Christian Sigrist and Reinhart Kößler: *Soziologie in Heidelberg*. In: Karin Buselmeier et al. (eds.): *Auch eine Geschichte der Universität Heidelberg*. Mannheim 1985, pp. 79–99 (here: pp. 83 f.).

5 Dirk Käsler: *Die frühe deutsche Soziologie*, loc. cit., pp. 37 f.

6 Dirk Käsler: *Soziologische Abenteuer*, loc. cit., p. 36.

the Democratic Party, saw it as a form of government that was categorically allocated to human communities. The second difference concerned the scientific orientation. The big brother traced the inexorable demystification of the world in modern capitalism as a fact, and his varied historical studies circled around this. Alfred Weber, on the other hand, was contrasting life with the solidified forms of the materialistic world. He saw the cultural shaping of existence as relatively independent from the laws and assessments of usefulness of modern civilization. He separated cultural movements from the civilization process and hoped to thus gain a better understanding of irregularities and step changes in history. He practiced a cultural sociology with a component related to the philosophy of life.

It seems obvious that this scientific attitude, committed to German idealism, was dismissive towards Marxism, i.e. historical materialism, and considered it wrong and harmful. Nevertheless, a lot of leftists, Marxist-oriented and communist-oriented males and some few female students, studied with Alfred Weber. The liberality of this man made it possible that both German-national rightists and socialists attended his seminar. He also ensured Karl Mannheim's habilitation, even though it had already been apparent in the mid-1920s that Mannheim was rather dismissive of an idealistic cultural-sociological interpretation of history and favoured societal studies that took into account Marxism. Norbert Elias encountered these two men, Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim, when he arrived in Heidelberg at the end of 1924.

In 1925 the departmental city of the free state Baden had nearly 23 000 inhabitants. In the same year, the Baden

state university had 2 500 students. They decisively shaped the medieval city centre, which had been rebuilt after the fire and destruction of the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century. Until the First World War, it was almost exclusively colour-wearing corporates who studied at the university. Now, in the mid-1920s, after the lost war and the formation of the Weimar Republic, ever more non-corporates studied in Heidelberg. They were called free students. A particular high number could be encountered—if not in the Café Knapp, the meeting place of the free students discussing everything and anything—in the Institute for Social and Political Sciences, which was located in the Hauptstraße in the Haus Weimar, a nice baroque building dating from 1715.

Sociology, social science in general, had even then been less conservative than the old subjects; it was rather leftist-innovative than rightist-restorative, and the students were therefore also less to be found in the duelling fraternities, despite the inexpensive conviviality of the fraternity houses and the protection by the ‘old gentlemen’. Another reason for the numerous free students in the social sciences was the large proportion of Jewish students, who had chosen the subject also because it seemed to provide them with better career opportunities. The fraternities with their partly open, partly subliminal antisemitism only very rarely accepted Jewish students and ‘of course’ no women at all. The proportion of women in relation to the entirety of students was still low. That, too, was a bit different in the social sciences.

It would be a misunderstanding to believe that the social scientists had been continuously ‘left’-oriented since the mid-1920s. There was a nationalist-oriented circle around Giselher Wirsing, the “Tatkreis” (literally, action circle). Al-

fred Weber had a national-socialistically agitating assistant named Eschmann. Arnold Bergsträsser, then recently habilitated and a young private lecturer, was German-nationally shaped. He, however, left Germany during fascism and did not return until after the end of the war.

## **A Prominent Position: Elias's Initial Time in Heidelberg**

Little is known about Elias's first days in Heidelberg. He himself remembered having worked off the sociological classics: "The works of Troeltsch, like those of Simmel, were part of the accepted intellectual furniture of sociology, which, impelled by the Heidelberg atmosphere"<sup>7</sup> About his first studies, he reported in the 'Frankfurter Lebenslauf': "At first, I completed a longer scientific paper on the 'history of human consciousness', which, for financial reasons, has not been printed until today. I then contributed to the seminars of Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim and started a paper "Zur Soziologie der entstehenden Naturwissenschaften"<sup>8</sup> and went to Florence to accumulate material. But because the 'Notgemeinschaft der deutschen Wissenschaft' (Emergency Association of German Science) could not raise funds, despite the support by Alfred Weber and Karl Mannheim, I had to abandon my already commenced studies for the time being".

7 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 16.

8 Norbert Elias: Zur Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften. In: Frühschriften, GS-Vol. 1, pp. 86–106.

So far, the earliest document available is a photo (Fig. 6) showing Elias during an excursion with friends of a social-student group. This photo dating from 1928 and another one from 1930 (Fig. 7), which had been created to mark the Heidelberg farewell party of Mannheim, evidence the intellectual range of the circle and, at the same time, the density of the sociological discourse in which Elias was located. One can also recognize from the 1928 photo that Elias was older than the others with whom he shared a table. He was, like the others, a learner of sociology. But since he was ten years older than the other members of the circle and had already finished his doctorate, a circumstance the others were still striving for, a special position arose for him. This position was described by Suse Schwarz,<sup>9</sup> later Schwarzenberger, in a letter to me dating from 23 March 1987: "Elias was always the quietest in the group, also older; he gave the impression of being an independent scholar".

The prominent position and his, as Elias always emphasized, independent attitude without any party affiliation in this circle consisting of social democrats (like Mark Mitnitzky, who fled to New York, there changed his name and made millions on the stock exchange), of socialists (like Otto Jacobsen, who had been an editor of the Rhine-Neckar newspaper in Heidelberg after the war), and of communists (like Boris Goldenberg or Heinrich Taut, who, after the war, had become a professor at the East Berlin Humboldt University) also had something to do with the fact that Elias was on good terms with Mannheim. "I quickly made friends

9 She was the assistant of the historian Radbruch and, probably, one of the first female university assistants in Heidelberg ever.



**Figure 6** The socialist students group Heidelberg during an excursion in 1928. Left to right: Ulrike Otto, Svend Riemer, Georg Schwarzenberger, Hans Gerth, Suse Schwarz, Norbert Elias, Boris Sapir, (?), Heinrich Taut.

with”<sup>10</sup> him as Elias has put it—and he had facilitated Elias’ contact to the students. In a conversation with me, Hans Speier—Mannheim’s first doctoral student (1928)—said that Elias had been Mannheim’s assistant. Whether this was with regard to formalities remains unclear. The corresponding documents are missing, be it that none existed or that they got lost. In his position as a young private lecturer, it is unlikely that Mannheim would have been entitled to an assistant but maybe to a kind of scientific helper on a part-time basis, as we would phrase it today.

That there was such a connection to Mannheim also follows from the memories of Richard Löwenthal: “Back then, Elias was an assistant at the University of Heidelberg”.

10 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 17.

Löwenthal also characterized the circle in which Elias had had a prominent position and described the latter's role: "The circle was an informal circle of friends, the centre point of which was Elias ... Mannheim was a very difficult person for people who worked with him. Elias, on the other hand, was a difficult person regarding those above". Already in Heidelberg, Elias had begun with mediation work between Mannheim and the students, which he subsequently—as we will see by means of some evidence—continued and expanded as Mannheim's official assistant in Frankfurt.

In Heidelberg, the focus on Mannheim had not been that 'professionalized' yet. Elias was also dependent on Alfred Weber, under whose guidance he wanted to habilitate himself with an examination of "the importance of Florentine society and culture for the rise of science".<sup>11</sup> Mannheim hardly came into question for this, since he did not even have the examination right for the doctoral oral exam (*Rigorosum*). In the case of Hans Speier, who unequivocally had been the doctoral student of Mannheim, a historian had to assume this task. Hence, Elias attended the seminar of both Mannheim and Weber. He was friends with the approximately similar aged Mannheim, helped him in dealing with the students, from which both benefited, the students as well as Mannheim.

At this time, Mannheim was 'the' aspiring young man, a brilliant analyst of any type of ideology. Nothing escaped his astute ideology critique; no object was safe from his high-level analysis. This did not change the fact that, as the long-standing professor, Alfred Weber was the, in the uni-

11 Loc. cit., p. 20.



versity system, more powerful, institutionally hardly assailable of the two. In his “Notes”, Elias described the subliminal rivalry between the two very different men. The rivalry did not surface, because Weber’s position was institutionally superior and because shabby intrigues and gossip about the others—today often a predominant feature of university rivalries—were not part of the dignified academic style of the Heidelberg liberal arts.<sup>12</sup>

12 Loc. cit., pp. 23 ff.

# Sixth Chapter

## The First Appearance at the Zurich 'Soziologentag'

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**A**lfred Weber's idealistic and Karl Mannheim's materialistic conception there were unambiguously opposite in a few points. These opposites, and also the rivalry of the two opponents, openly emerged during the Sixth German 'Soziologentag' [Congress of Sociology] which took place from 17 to 19 September 1928 in Zurich.

After having previously convened in Vienna (1926), the German Sociological Association had gone to a non-German city for the second time to do justice to the "international character of sociology".<sup>1</sup> Two "subject areas" were dealt with in two key notes each. Paul Hönigswald and Franz Oppenheimer talked on the topic of "migration", Leopold von Wiese and Karl Mannheim discussed "competition". Mannheim's early notability can easily be sensed when one notices that it was by no means common at the time for a young private lecturer to be invited to give the sup-

1 Leopold von Wiese, quoted from Ursula Karger: *Institutionsgeschichtliche Zäsuren in der deutschen Soziologie. Dargestellt am Beispiel der Deutschen Soziologentage*. Doctoral thesis. Bochum 1978, p. 112.

plementary lecture to one of the important figures—here the editor of the Cologne quarterlies, the influential Leopold von Wiese—during the plenary session. The latter addressed the topic “predominately as a sociological-systematic consideration”,<sup>2</sup> as the subtitle of his lecture said. His relation-sociological investigation turned out a bit dry—this made the intellectual fireworks Mannheim subsequently lightened even more clearly visible. The talk “The meaning of competition within the field of the intellectual”<sup>3</sup> showed him on a peak of his scientific development: the talk is a piece of the history of sociology that became very important for the sociology of knowledge. I cannot reproduce the complete talk at this point, but I can draw on a few important points that were of importance for the relation of Elias to Mannheim and Alfred Weber.

Mannheim had precisely emphasized that “from the perspective of the social sciences” (as he understood them, one has to add) “any historic, ideological, sociological knowledge—even if it was the absolute correctness and truth itself—was embedded and supported by the drive to power and recognition by concrete groups who wanted to make *their* interpretation of the world that of the public”.<sup>4</sup> This did sound a lot like the Marxist theory of base and superstructure. Without doubts, Mannheim’s position had been pre-

2 Leopold von Wiese: Die Konkurrenz, vorwiegend in soziologisch-systematischer Betrachtung. In: Verhandlungen des 6. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 17.–19. 9. 1928 in Zürich. Tübingen 1929, pp. 15–35.

3 Karl Mannheim: Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz im Gebiete des Geistigen. In: Verhandlungen des 6. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 17.–19. 9. 1928 in Zürich. Tübingen 1929, pp. 35–83.

4 Karl Mannheim: Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz, loc. cit., p. 45.

shaped by Marx, but he had made specific changes and, as he understood them, “syntheses of differing interpretation”.

Mannheim based his investigations on thought itself, which is then traced back to social and economic relations. For Mannheim, ‘base’ are therefore not the material-economic circumstances but the intellectual comprehension and consciousness of these phenomena. These shaped the intellectual elements of the superstructure and with this the differing interpretations of being, the ideologies. Mannheim focusses on the term ideology—here also in clear distinction from Marx—not on the existence of a consciousness that was wrongly determined by class interests. There are not only classes but, following Mannheim, also overlapping intellectual strata. The rejection of an existence of a false consciousness implies the declination of a proper consciousness, i.e. only a ‘relative’ consciousness existed. In contrast to Marx, Mannheim did not interpret toward a goal whose achievement would cause the false consciousness to disappear; rather he saw the historical development as a process in which differences could not be eventually dissolved.

Even if Mannheim differed from Marx in some important points, his position was unequivocally shaped by a materialist attitude. This alone must have brought him in opposition to the established forbearers of the subject, just as they had concentrated on the positions overcoming or avoiding Marxism. Mannheim went even one step further by declaring the sociology of knowledge to be the central discipline. Its task was uncovering the restrictions of time and location in the thinking. It was the new, modern science, having emerged from the differentiating opposition between idealistic and materialistic positions and the competitive strug-

gle which connected them. Sociology of knowledge not only improved the forms and contents of thinking but also the scientific concepts of history and sociology. The various forms of intellectual competition shaped their respective thought patterns, the “social structure certainly [had] a co-constitutive meaning for the concrete shape of the thinking connected to existence”. The accompanying “exasperating thought disposition”<sup>5</sup> could only be satisfyingly overcome by a sociological—and for Mannheim this was a knowledge-sociological—research question.

## **September 1928: The Controversy Between Karl Mannheim and Alfred Weber**

**T**he new questioning alone was already worthy of discussion. Mannheim had additionally triggered conflict by directly attacking Alfred Weber, his Heidelberg senior partner. In order to substantiate the thought positions within science, which were influenced by various social structures, he cited as an example the diverse statements on the problem of value freedom. While socialism observed in its opponent irrationality and conservatism insisted on the primacy of the irrational, liberalism believed that it could “neatly” separate the “rational from the irrational”.<sup>6</sup> Here Mannheim quotes Alfred Weber as a representative of liberalism and attacks him head-on: “Even with liberalism and democracy

5 Loc. cit., p. 82.

6 Loc. cit., p. 68.

being parties of the centre, they derive from this position an impetus to create an intermediary discussion basis between the parties. The will to a discussion basis cannot permit believing in unreconcilabilities of a fundamental nature, i.e. conflicts that could not be solved with the help of sheer intellect. In view of the fundamental severability of the valuation of theory, this school of thought originally denied the phenomenon of an existence-bound thought, meaning a thought that, by definition, irremovably (i.e. in its texture) contained the irrational”<sup>7</sup>

During the debate which followed the two keynotes, most of the speakers commented on Mannheim’s lecture. This, however, was following the hierarchical order. First the privy councillors spoke: the president of the German Sociological Association, Ferdinand Tönnies, was the first, followed by Alfred Weber and Werner Sombart. Then—after the speaking time had been reduced from twenty to six minutes—the professors were allowed to take the floor and, finally, a couple of doctores, amongst them Elias whose verbal contribution was his first printed sociological statement. The various aspects and facets of this discussion, which was also a continuation of the controversy about the location of German sociology, would be worth more detailed remarks. Here, I will only refer to the contributions by Alfred Weber<sup>8</sup> and Elias<sup>9</sup> that show how much Elias had already back then

7 Loc. cit., p. 69.

8 Alfred Weber: Beitrag zur Diskussion über “Die Konkurrenz”. In: Verhandlungen des 6. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 17.-19. 9. 1928 in Zürich. Tübingen 1929, pp. 88–92

9 Norbert Elias: Idea and individual. A contribution to the philosophy of history (1924). In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, Early Writings, UCD 2005, pp. 55–57.

become acquainted with the controversy of sociology and how he had gone between the conflicting positions or had rather stayed outside of these positions.

Alfred Weber, who spoke after Tönnies, could, as Elias reports in his “Notes”, “in this case he had difficulty in hiding his anger”.<sup>10</sup> In his heated reply, he denounced Mannheim’s “sublime intellectualism”, which acted with extraordinary grace and freedom but “has to have exactly the same effect and needs to lead to the very same results as the coarsened intellectualism represented by the old materialist conception of history”.<sup>11</sup> (One almost expects the exclamation ‘*Sie Zivilisationsliterat!*’ [You civilization literatus!]) He claimed Mannheim was incapable of understanding the creative-intellectual as the foundation of action; furthermore, his knowledge-sociological fundamental consideration, which argued that what is known about an object, how it is thought about, would depend on the respective situation, was wrong. There was always only one object and one complete being: “Capitalism is a particular, unique, clear object. Here, I simply take its empiric-positivist reality. In my view, there can be but a differing approach and differing illumination of the same object, but it is impossible that there are differing objects and differing knowledge”. Previously, he had apodictically noticed in this context: “I will never admit this”.<sup>12</sup>

In his “Notes”, Elias delineated this controversy in detail but only dealt with his own contribution in a short paragraph. He had tried, so he writes, to interpret “the antithe-

10 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 37.

11 Alfred Weber: Beitrag zur Diskussion über “Die Konkurrenz”, loc. cit., p. 92.

12 Loc. cit., p. 91.

sis between Weber and Mannheim (not quite correctly) in terms more familiar to me today as the disagreement between an exponent of thinking in eternal laws and an exponent of thinking in structured processes”.<sup>13</sup> This was not quite justifiably, because he had not yet fully seen the aspect that the respective knowledge is the result of an unplanned, but in the long-term structured, process.

In light of the later more differentiated draft of the knowledge theory, this modesty was honourable, but Elias did not have to hide his ‘early light’ under a bushel. In his verbal contribution there can indeed be found concepts of his later more explicitly explained independent position. Thinking in processes, the possibility to distinguish separate phases of the process-like development, and the emphasis on the necessity as a sociologist to strive for a detached attitude to society and himself—these are three important components of the Eliasian work that can already be detected here.

## **Masterpiece, Part I: Contribution to the Discussion on “Die Konkurrenz” (‘The Competition’)**

Initially, Elias spoke about the meaning of Mannheim’s approach in general and connected this to a statement on the further development of mental ideals (he did not yet speak of knowledge).

“It appears”, he said, “to be the fate of Western culture that a new ideal image gradually grows up from the ideal image

13 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 39.



with which the validity and happiness of a series of generations has been bound up. In a dialectical movement, to and fro, the new ideal attacks the older one at its core, breaks it up and finally supersedes it. What we have heard today seems to me a direct expression of such a radical switch from one quite specific type of intellectual ideal to a new and different one".<sup>14</sup>

Mannheim, he continued, did not only convey a new theory but also a specific new 'attitude towards life', which meant—the text makes this clear—a new scientific attitude in the dealing with societal processes. "Anyone who places the 'creative human being' at the centre of his reflections still has, fundamentally, the feeling of existing for himself alone, of himself forming, as it were, a beginning and an end. Anyone who places historical movements of human society at the centre must also know that he himself is neither beginning nor end, but, if I might express it thus, a link in the chain. Clearly, this awareness imposes on its bearer a very different kind of moderation than the former viewpoint".<sup>15</sup>

At the end of his short contribution, he once again addressed the problem of knowledge by asking the question of why humans in the different phases of societal development are "compelled" to experience nature in a particular way. "Whether we wish to or not, we cannot experience nature in any way that does not correspond to our historical situa-

14 Norbert Elias: *Idea and individual. A contribution to the philosophy of history* (1924). In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 1, *Early Writings*, UCD 2005, p. 68.

15 *Loc. cit.*, p. 69.

tion, just as medieval people were compelled to experience nature in a quite different way to ours, as a realm of spirits".<sup>16</sup>

He concluded his short contribution with a research issue already familiar to him, which aimed at the comparison of several differing societal developmental phases. This was not only important for the methodology; it also allowed him to extract himself from the current controversy between his Heidelberg reference persons at the end of his contribution, which indicated sympathy for Mannheim's position. Quite apart from the fact that one can also understand the passage on creative humans as a hidden criticism of Mannheim's attempt to escape from the suspicion of ideology regarding the own position by drawing on the thesis that individual members of the free-floating intelligence could manage to evade, at least partly, their class position and the social structure.

Already back then, it was recognizable that Elias did not think much of the relationalist rescue from the relativism of Mannheim's imprint. He rather relied on asking research questions that were more accurate and on developing better examination methods—which led him to the comparison of long-term societal processes and to a more detached relation to current societal and political controversies. Not without reason, at several instances he emphasized that even back then he did not want to associate himself with any party.<sup>17</sup> This is, as should be remembered and to prevent misunderstandings, by no means identical to the freedom from value judgment. It is just as impossible to keep out classify-

16 Loc. cit., pp. 69 f.

17 Cf. Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 12.

ing and evaluating of sociological work as it is to keep it out of natural scientific work. It depends on the controlled and detached manner in which this is done. And the process-like development gives sociology, too, the opportunity to increasingly deal better, i.e. more controlled and detached, with classifications and evaluations.

There is a progress of cognition, an insight which, already back then, distinguished Elias—not least fostered by the considerations in the context of the doctoral thesis on the emergence and the learning of ideas—from Mannheim. Certainly, he agreed with the latter that knowledge-sociological ideology critique had to replace the politicization of science and scientific debate. But in contrast to Mannheim, for whom knowledge played on the same level even in the case of differing social circumstances, Elias already saw that the relativization had to be and could be overcome, if the structure of knowledge—or that of ideologies—could be researched in the individual phases of societal development in more detail.

## **Masterpiece, Part II: Contribution to the Discussion on “Anfänge der Kunst”**

The various structures of knowledge were also the subject of a second verbal contribution by Elias at the Zurich ‘Soziologentag’.<sup>18</sup> The following day, during the debate about Richard Thurnwald’s lecture on “Die Anfänge der

18 Norbert Elias: Contribution to the debate on Richard Thurnwald, Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, UCD 2005, pp. 70–75.

Kunst”,<sup>19</sup> he once more took the floor and made a connection to the topic of the previous day. For Thurnwald it was about an understanding of artist expression of the—then derogatorily called—‘primitives.’ Elias took up the conclusion of Thurnwald’s contribution to the Weber-Mannheim-controversy and asked whether one had actually understood correctly how the ‘primitives’ experienced their world if one explains it in the own, modern terms. He doubted this with an understatement that had always honoured him: “it is perhaps not quite without value for a critic once in a while to point out modestly what is still to be done. And I for one believe that, if one disregards scientific terminology and thinks of the living primitive man, much still needs to be done before we can really say that we have understood him. Here lies one of the most decisive problems which has to be taken into account in a theory of understanding.

The first thing we see when we encounter this strange person is that we do not understand him. In creating a theory of ‘understanding’, the task, therefore, is not just to show how it is possible for a human being to understand human beings, but to show at the same time how it is possible that we do not understand each other. And this applies of course not only to our relation to the primitive, but also, in a different form, to our relations amongst ourselves.”<sup>20</sup>

In order to illustrate the, until then rather abstractly

19 Richard Thurnwald: *Die Anfänge der Kunst*. In: *Verhandlungen des 6. Deutschen Soziologentages vom 17.–19. 9. 1928 in Zürich*. Tübingen 1929, p. 248.

20 Norbert Elias: *Contribution to the debate on Richard Thurnwald. On primitive art*, *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 1, *Early Writings*, UCD 2005, pp. 70–75, pp. 71 f.

treated, problems, Elias told an anecdote.<sup>21</sup> This was a didactic step he often used in verbal contributions, essays and commentaries. In this case, it was the story of a French general whom the indigenous soldiers (i.e. the ‘primitives’) in Africa encounter with insubordination when a solar eclipse occurs which forbids them to continue the forward march. The general then explains the natural scientific circumstance of solar eclipses to the leader of the indigenous soldiers. When the sheikh said he understood the circumstance the French—delighted with the successful clarification—was about to set forth again, but the sheikh said it was not possible since it was known that when the sun darkens, this was because a ghost held his coat in front of the sun, and thus it was impossible to move on.

The scientific explanation, Elias evaluates his anecdote, describes the sheikh’s incomprehension as mystically or magically bound. But what was actually explained with this, he asks and states: “The task of understanding seems to me to be to raise the question of how the primitive himself experience the world. Why is he *forced* to experience the world thus and not differently, and why are we *forced*—we have no choice—to experience the world thus and not differently, although both of us—probably—share the same human nature? From where does this unavoidability come, this inner necessity which makes the primitive experience a tree thus and not differently—as a spirit! And makes it impossible for us to experience the tree as a spirit?”<sup>22</sup>

As a conclusion of this contribution, Elias, here also hint-

21 Loc. cit.

22 Loc. cit., p. 73.

ing at later explanations, confronted the idea that modern societies constituted progress in contradistinction to the ‘primitives’. Interest in them had to have a different interpretation. Other than philosophy—which had to have in mind the very period of the human society in which a first turn-over to enlightenment had taken place, i.e. the antiquity—the modern social sciences highlighted (here, however, Elias insinuated his own view) “that the human becomes understandable only when it is comprehended in its entirety [...] that it is necessary, in order to understand *oneself*, to go back as far as at all possible in the study of man”.<sup>23</sup> In fact, each episode of humanity was likewise current—a statement which comprised a rejection of the evolutionist belief in progress and, at the same time, indicated initial contours of its future civilization-theoretical research programme. The comparative investigation of various phases of societal progression served the better understanding of both the respective section of evolution and the societal connections in which one lives as a social scientist.

## 1929/30: From Heidelberg to Frankfurt

With the two contributions at the Zurich ‘Soziologentag’, Elias not only indicated his future mastery but also underlined his claim to be offered a professorship at a German university despite his Jewish descent. He was able to keep up with the dispute of the well-known and influential. He had delivered his masterpiece, less than four years

23 Loc. cit., pp. 74 f.

after he had begun to turn to sociology as an academic discipline and as a career path. But the road to professorship was still long because for Alfred Weber he was located at the fourth or fifth position of the Habilitanden (postdoctoral students). This meant a further waiting period of a good ten years.

However, a year after the Zurich 'Soziologentag', Mannheim was appointed the Oppenheimer professorial chair for sociology in Frankfurt. He invited Elias to accompany him as his assistant. Elias, for whom the postdoctoral qualification, the Habilitation, was very important, agreed after Mannheim had promised him that he would lead him to the postdoctoral qualification after the three years of assistantship. Elias thought he could cut short the way through the bottleneck of academic qualification and therefore followed Mannheim to Frankfurt.

Beforehand, at the end of the winter semester 1929/30, the circle around Elias celebrated a farewell event for Mannheim. A theatrical piece was performed which, as Richard Löwenthal remembers, had been written collectively, with Elias as 'spiritus rector'. The play's title was freely adapted from Aristophanes: "Die Wolken, oder Politik als Wissenschaft" ("The Clouds, or Politics as Science"). The piece was a great success, fully in the tradition of Heidelberg's academic-sociable festivities. Marianne Weber, writes Löwenthal, was touched: she had not thought that something like this would still be possible in Heidelberg. Mannheim, too, was very pleased. This honoured him, because the piece not only poked fun at his students but also at him. For example, when Socrates learns over the telephone of his calling: "Imagine, I am no longer a *private sophist*, one decided to call me to the chair".



**Figure 7** Heidelberg 1930: Rehearsal for the graduation ceremony of Karl Mannheim. Left to right: Richard Löwenthal, Boris Goldenberg, Otto Jacobsen, Mark Mitnitzky. Seated from left: Norbert Elias, René Cassirer, (?)

And when he eventually asks his wife what she thought of it, she—certainly prioritising his decisions—advises him: “Just as you please, but if you ask me: Yes!” A scene that surely often took place in the apartments of German private lecturers.

Richard Löwenthal also possessed documents about this play. His memories, too, show that it was not a circle of blind epigones at work but critical-self-critical students, who were quite ready and capable of treating their own and the position of the ‘master’ with irony. A couple of verses, which also evidenced the detached attitude of the ‘spiritus rector’ Elias, towards the job as a future Frankfurt professor, shall serve as the conclusion to this chapter on the Heidelberg years. Even



though Elias's authorship to them might only be partial, they nonetheless constitute an appropriate end point of his first five years in sociology. The verses are the following:

That he taught dialectic to us,  
Which gives power over the masses,  
We gave Socrates the honour,  
Visited his institute of thinking.

There he taught us to point out  
The adversary's view as limited.  
Mortified every layman has to remain silent,  
He learns from us how he thinks.

Is everything resolved so wisely,  
Whether science, whether religion  
In the end, silently dissolves  
The masters' own conception.<sup>24</sup>

24 The complete piece is published in GS-Bd. 1, pp. 124–147, the first three verses are on the pages 132/3.

# Seventh Chapter

## The End in Frankfurt

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Everything had started so well. With the appointment of Karl Mannheim in Frankfurt, Kurt Riezler, the chancellor of the Johann-Wolfgang-Goethe-University, took a decisive further step to make Frankfurt the centre of sociology. In 1930, the same year when Mannheim moved from Heidelberg to Frankfurt, a professorship for social philosophy was established for Max Horkheimer. In October 1930 he assumed the related leadership of the Institute for Social Research. Altogether, Frankfurt was then one of the leading universities, which experienced its prime during the years 1928 to 1932. When, in 1928, Paul Tillich accepted an appointment to a philosophy professorship at the Frankfurt University—in contrast to other universities, this one did not have a theological faculty—he considered it to be “the most modern and liberal university”.<sup>1</sup> Besides the de-

1 Paul Tillich: *Autobiographische Betrachtungen*. In: id.: *Begegnungen*. Paul Tillich über sich selbst und andere. *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. XII. Stuttgart 1971, p. 69.

terminated work of Kurt Riezler, the social-democratic and the bourgeois-democratic spirit of the city of Frankfurt and the cultural policy of the bourgeois-liberal Prussian minister of education and the arts, Kurt Becker, needs mentioning if one wants to trace the reasons why Frankfurt had then been so attractive for many well-known scholars and for aspiring young scientists.<sup>2</sup>

With Mannheim, Horkheimer and Tillich the persons are mentioned who were grouped around the intellectual Left. The latter did not belong to the closest circle of the Institute for Social Research and the Sociological Seminar which was in the same building, Viktoria-Allee 17. The head of the house was Max Horkheimer. The sociological department, whose director was Karl Mannheim, had rooms in the ground floor which was rented by the university. Also accommodated there was the Frankfurt Psychoanalytical Institute and the Institute for Financial Research of the national economist Wilhelm Gerloff.

## **Assistant to Karl Mannheim: Elias' Activities at the Sociological Seminar**

**A**t Easter 1930, Elias took up his work as an assistant to Karl Mannheim at the Sociological Seminar. His task consisted of helping with the preparations for the seminars, providing guidance for students, keeping contact to Theodor

2 For this see Rolf Wiggershaus: *Die Frankfurter Schule. Geschichte – Theoretische Entwicklung – Politische Bedeutung*. München/Wien 1986, pp. 19 ff.

Wiesengrund-Adorno and working on his postdoctoral thesis. Theodor Wiesengrund, in the course catalogue of the winter semester 1932/33 still listed as a private lecturer (still without Adorno), was Horkheimer's extended arm concerning the contacts to his colleague Karl Mannheim. Horkheimer and Mannheim—these were two different worlds. Origins, temperament and scientific orientation distinguished them, and as far as they—concerning ambition and power of performance—were similar, this increased their distance between each other.

The relationship between Institute and Seminar was not particularly close. One would cooperate where necessary; otherwise one would meet at the 'Kränzchen'. This was a periodical discussion forum at the Institute for Social Research, in which outsiders like Mannheim, the university coordinator Kurt Riezler, the neurologist Kurt Goldstein and the pedagogue Karl Mennicke were participating, too. Discussions were acrimonious there. "We were often all over each other, like wild animals; one can hardly imagine that, in an unreservedness that did not even spare the fiercest attacks: that one was ideological or not, that his thinking was groundless or whatever that was; but all of that did not cause even the gentlest erosion of friendship".<sup>3</sup>

This discussion forum was no solitaire. It did not stand alone in the daily university routine but was an expression of the intellectual climate, which also included parts of the population of Frankfurt. Elias reported in his acceptance

3 Theodor Adorno, quoted after Wolfgang Schivelbusch: *Intellektuellen-dämmerung. Zur Lage der Frankfurter Intelligenz in den 20er Jahren*. Frankfurt/Main 1982, p. 166.

speech for the award of the Theodor W. Adorno Prize that it had been “an established practice for man and, especially, women from the wider society of the city to visit more or less regularly lectures given by interesting and stimulating university teachers. The problems raised in the lectures became topics of conversation at parties and social gatherings of all kinds”<sup>4</sup>

Karl Mannheim’s lectures attracted many external visitors. The ones visited by a particularly high amount of ladies of the high society were called ‘Schleierkollegs’ (veil lectures) in the in-house lingo. But Elias had little to do with this. As in Heidelberg, he administered to the students, especially the doctoral students. The autobiographical retrospect by Margarete Sallis-Freudenthal contains a passage on this, describing Elias’s role well. Sallis-Freudenthal had started a doctoral thesis on household and home economics under Mannheim’s supervision. After the early death of her husband Berthold Freudenthal, a well-renowned Frankfurt teacher of constitutional and criminal law, she had resumed her studies.

She had chosen the doctoral thesis subject based on a, as she wrote, “bitter-sweet tendency and experience”, a choice that might have been influenced by Elias, about whose role she reported: “Professor Mannheim had brought along an assistant from Heidelberg, who had exactly that which Mannheim did not. Not shining like the fascinating inventor and proclaimer, Dr Elias was introversive, thorough, me-

4 Norbert Elias: Address on Adorno: respect and critique. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 16, Essays III. On sociology and the humanities, UCD 2009, pp. 82–92 (here: p. 83).

thodical and full of unselfish helpfulness for all of us. The things we did not understand in the lecture, he explained us; when we were stuck with our work, he engaged with the problems as if they were his own”.<sup>5</sup> She completed her doctoral thesis<sup>6</sup> at the end of 1933 and published it in 1934. Afterwards, she migrated to Palestine.

The assumption that the topic of her doctoral thesis was influenced by Elias is based on two additional reports by doctoral students of the time. Gisèle Freund and Ilse Seglow have delivered concurring statements, partly using the same words, concerning Elias’s role as mediating between Mannheim and the students. As a young student, the famous photographer Gisèle Freund was in search of a subject for her doctoral thesis. Already back then, she was an avid amateur photographer. “Elias knew about this ... (he) suggested ... as the subject the social development of photography during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. He gave me instructions how I should commence, and I have a lot to thank him because it was this work that, upon completion, gave rise to my later profession”.<sup>7</sup>

Ilse Seglow reported analogously. The daughter of Frankfurt rabbi Seligman, in her memory, received the following

5 Margarete Sallis-Freudenthal: *Ich habe mein Land gefunden. Autobiographischer Rückblick.* Frankfurt/Main 1977, pp. 109 f.

6 It is thanks to Katharina Rutschky that the study was once again published in 1986: Margarete Freudenthal: *Gestaltwandel der städtischen, bürgerlichen und proletarischen Hauswirtschaft zwischen 1760 und 1910.* Edited and with a preface by Katharina Rutschky. Frankfurt/Main/Berlin 1986.

7 Gisèle Freund: *Norbert Elias als Lehrer.* In: *Human Figurations*, loc. cit., pp. 12–14 (here: p. 13). The mentioned thesis is: Gisèle Freund: *La Photographie en France au dix-neuvième siècle: Étude de sociologie et d'esthétique.* Paris 1936.

advice: “You have been an actress. That is the field you know intimately—always a great advantage for a sociologist”.<sup>8</sup>

The most important biography of Karl Mannheim, Kurt H. Wolff, has expressed similar views. He had arrived in Frankfurt in 1930, after his Abitur (school qualification for university entrance). He had wanted to become a poet and write poems and plays. Someone told him about Mannheim—he was the latest trend, one simply had to hear him. So Wolff did. Instantly, he was fascinated by him, “primarily”, as he remembers, “for two reasons: firstly, he wore silk shirts, blue ones; secondly, he had a Hungarian accent. I found both absolutely enchanting”.<sup>9</sup> No need to say, later Wolff also found stimulating Mannheim’s knowledge-sociological considerations. He commenced a doctoral thesis on the intelligentsia of his home town Darmstadt. One would be right to see in this a resounding of Elias’s principle to write about something of which one already has deeper knowledge. Wolff reports: “Norbert Elias, Mannheim’s assistant, (was) *very helpful*”.<sup>10</sup>

In the reports on Elias’s achievements in the Sociological Seminar, one location where the corresponding (advisory) meetings took place was the Café Laumer—a, as Wolfgang Schivelbusch describes it, “bourgeois confectionery-café at

8 Ilse Seglow: Work at a research programme. In: *Human Figurations*, loc. cit., pp. 16–21 (here: p. 18).

9 Kurt H. Wolff: *Wie ich zur Soziologie kam und wo ich bin: Ein Gespräch mit Kurt H. Wolff*. Aufgezeichnet von Prof. Dr. Nico Stehr, Edmonton. In: M. Rainer Lepsius (Hrsg.): *Soziologie in Deutschland und Österreich 1918–1945. Materialien zur Entwicklung, Emigration und Wirkungsgeschichte* (special issue 23 of the *KZfSS*). Opladen 1981, pp. 324–346 (here: p. 324).

10 Kurt H. Wolff: *Wie ich zur Soziologie kam*, loc. cit., p. 326.

the Bockenheimer Landstraße, corner Brentanostraße, popular especially with the sociologists and philosophers of the Institute for Social Research and Karl Mannheim's circles".<sup>11</sup> After the lectures and other events, one sat here and continued the discussions. Theodor Wiesengrund-Adorno held his 'Nachseminare' (after-lectures) here. These hours in the Café Laumer have, as is repeatedly reported, contributed much to the intellectual education, both scientifically and politically, often even more than the individual seminars. Here was the location where the newest theses by teachers and colleagues, new developments in neighbouring disciplines, in literature and the arts could be discussed, amours were started and ended, and the stylish surroundings were admired, including the outstanding pastry.

## **Fascism as Battle Noise**

Everything had started so well, and initially everything seemed to be going well. Admittedly, there were ever darker clouds appearing in the sky of the political scene. One took note of them and, in vigorous opposition, discussed them. But—as improbable and peculiar this may appear to us today as we overlook the structure of the unfolding developments of the time—the danger was not realistically apparent to the leftist scientists involved in said process. Kurt H. Wolff had characterized the situation as “blindness towards what was happening politically”.<sup>12</sup> One did know about

11 Wolfgang Schivelbusch: *Intellektuellendämmerung*, loc. cit., p. 163.

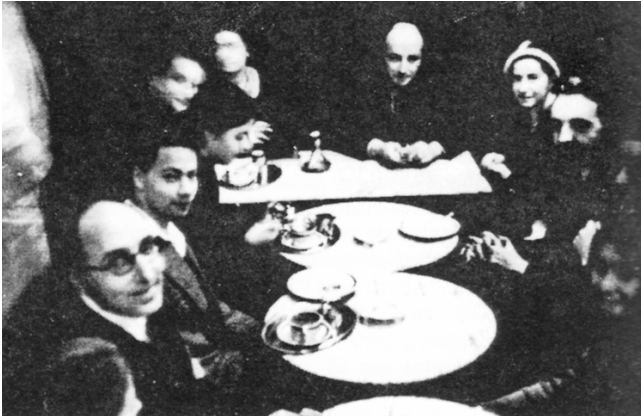
12 Kurt H. Wolff: *Wie ich zur Soziologie kam*, loc. cit., p. 325.



the National Socialists' dangerous objectives and was also alarmed by the increasing brutality of the political struggle, of which in the Café Lamar one only heard the battle noise and listened to the occasional reports by eye witnesses. Apparently this was mostly an event which, like stage dramaturgy, drew on teichoscopy—a narrative strategy that has an observer narrate the happenings on the other side of a wall, usually battle turmoil or other scenes that would take (too) many performers.

Even in the lectures the rising fascism had not been covered. Mannheim planned a book on liberalism, in a sense a sequel to his studies on conservatism. In connection with these plans, he had already in 1931 encouraged an interdisciplinary seminar which had been realised for the fourth time in the winter semester 1932/33. Party to this were—besides Mannheim—Adolf Löwe, Arnold Bergstraesser and the historian Ulrich Noack. The assistants alternated in the accompanying workgroups and therefore called themselves “Liberale Fliegergruppe” (liberal flying corps). After the assumption of power, this earned Elias a summons by the Sturmabteilung (the armed and uniformed branch of the National Socialist German Workers Party, the NSDAP) because the Nazis suspected the ‘Fliegergruppe’ to be a paramilitary group. Furthermore, in the winter semester 1932/33, Mannheim read “Kultur und Gesellschaft. Historische Analysen des Zusammenhangs von Wirtschafts-, Sozial- und Geisteswissenschaften”.

It was not only in Mannheim's case—as Sven Papcke documents—that the uprising fascism was not made an issue of university lectures. This might be because one did not feel responsible, underestimated the dynamic of the rising



**Figure 8** Karl Mannheim during the “Nachseminar” (after-lecture) in the Café Laumer (1932). Front row left: Norbert Elias, in the middle, to the right: Karl Pfauter. (Photo Gisèle Freund)

movement or generally rejected this topic. For this, Papcke quotes from a letter written by Elias on 15 November 1982: “One did occasionally discuss Italian fascism. But the National Socialism under Hitler was not completely taken seriously as a political movement in the academic circles I knew. Because it was vulgar, barbaric and—with its shrillness, its philosophy for semi-educated, its blatant symbolisms—actually seemed quite alien to people of the old educational tradition, nobody thought of addressing it in sociological lectures or investigations, as far as I remember”.<sup>13</sup>

13 Sven Papcke: *Weltferne Wissenschaft. Die deutsche Soziologie der Zwischenkriegszeit vor dem Problem des Faschismus/Nationalsozialismus*. In: id. (ed.): *Ordnung und Theorie. Beiträge zur Geschichte der Soziologie in Deutschland*. Darmstadt 1986, pp. 168–222 (here: p. 188, note 89).

Sure, one was not apolitical—quite the contrary—and certainly not completely without premonition. The administration of the Institute for Social Research, for instance, already began at an early stage the transference out of the country of financial assets. But overall it should be noted that those who were involved in the political development processes of the time were not as entirely aware about its structure and direction as we are today in our historiographic investigations of the very process, which led from the 19<sup>th</sup> century via the First World War through the time of the Weimar Republic to the assumption of power by the National Socialist on 30 January 1933. But this time has not come yet.

## **The Postdoctoral Thesis: The Courtly Human and the Courtly Society**

**F**ull of confidence in the opportunities his occupation at the Sociological Seminar opened up for him, Elias worked on his postdoctoral thesis. As Margarete Sallis-Freudenthal remembered, everyone assumed “that he would become Mannheim’s private lecturer”.<sup>14</sup> Thus was the plan in Heidelberg, and there seemed nothing stopping it. At the request of Elias, Horkheimer provided an additional room for him in the Institute for Social Research and permitted the use of the Institute’s library. There he wrote his postdoctoral thesis, which, as already mentioned, was published by

14 Margarete Sallis-Freudenthal: *Ich habe mein Land gefunden*, loc. cit., p. 110.

Luchterhand in an elaborated version under the title “Die höfische Gesellschaft” (“The Court Society”<sup>15</sup>) in 1969.

One has to assume, however, that today’s text is not identical with the doctoral thesis. The latter was titled “Der höfische Mensch” (the courtly human). At the time of his request to be admitted to the postdoctoral studies, Elias submitted as a subtitle “Ein Beitrag zur Soziologie des Hofes, der höfischen Gesellschaft und des absoluten Königtums”, a contribution on the sociology of the court, the courtly society and absolute royalty. Margarete Freudenthal has quoted the study.<sup>16</sup> According to an entry on the request form, the manuscript was issued to her for unknown reasons on 17 June 1934.

Today’s version of “Die höfische Gesellschaft” (1969) unequivocally contains parts which were written later. For instance, those parts which quoted as evidence the subsequently written book “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” and which also included conclusions of several chapters that had more sophisticated argumentations than the presentation of problems in the first version. Mostly these are also the parts in which the wealth of notes suddenly breaks off and contemporary and historical texts are no longer referred to. Thus it is in all likelihood that the chapter “Zur Soziogenese der aristokratischen Romantik im Zuge der Verhofung” (‘On the sociogenesis of the aristocratic romantic in the context of courtisation’), in the centre of which stood the origination and meaning of the novel “L’Atrée” by Honoré

15 Volume 2 of the Collected Works of Norbert Elias, UCD 2006.

16 Margarete Freudenthal: *Gestaltwandel der städtischen, bürgerlichen und proletarischen Hauswirtschaft*, loc. cit. p. 15 (note 6).

d'Urfé, was not a component of the first text on “Der höfische Mensch” because it lack annotations—a procedure which Elias had not practised until a later point in time and which furthermore would not have been appropriate for a postdoctoral thesis.

Therefore, parts of the book can be identified, with virtual certainty, as parts of the postdoctoral thesis. However, it would not be sensible to divide the book into old and new sections. It is a single unit whose basis is an earlier processing stage and which dealt with the crucial significance the court and the courtly society had in 17<sup>th</sup>- and 18<sup>th</sup>-century Europe. In his book, Elias takes up an aspect which had already concerned him in his contribution to the ‘Blau-Weiß-Blätter’ and his verbal contribution on Thurnwald’s talk “Die Anfänge der Kunst” in Zurich. Back then he had criticized that today’s evolutionist thinking prevented an adequate understanding of ‘primitive’ art. Now he observes that “an after-effect of the Bourgeois opposition to the court, as was mentioned in the Introduction, frequently obstructs our view of the representativeness of the courts and court society” (pp. 40 f.).<sup>17</sup> Right at the start he clarified that the contemporary reflections on courtly nobility—he mentions Franz Oppenheimer, Max Weber and Werner Sombart—cannot be sufficient. Regarding Oppenheimer’s assessment of the holding of court as “refined tastes”, “perverse luxury”, he remarks that his facts and evaluations are “not really wrong” (the careful phrasing of a postdoctoral fel-

17 The locations of the quotes for Norbert Elias: “The Court Society” (Höfische Gesellschaft = HG) in this chapter are following the carefully reviewed version of the second volume of the Collected Works of Norbert Elias with the respective page number.

low) but “the perspective [...] completely obscures the context which produced them and in which alone they can be understood” (p. 42). He distances himself from Weber and Sombart in a similar manner.

Already back then, Elias related to him in his own clear language the history of the genesis of Ludwig XIV’s absolutist court. Starting with the latter’s predecessors, he shows how “very gradually the court acquired its character as both an organisation supporting the nobility and an instrument for maintaining the king’s rule against the nobility” developed (p. 202). The courtly society became the elite formation of the centralized, absolutist state.

The interesting fact about this long-term structured development of courtization is that those involved in this process became more and more dependent on each other. This slow transformation of a former “based primarily on nature-economically warrior- and squire-nobility as a top strata (into) a primarily monetary based courtly aristocracy” (HG, 366) was not planned but resulted from the ambivalent power relationships between the king and the nobility. The nobility required the king for the preservation of their privileges and a life befitting their social status. The king, in contrast, required the nobility “above all as an indispensable weight in the equilibrium of classes that he ruled” (p. 222). Terms like feudal nobility and aristocracy thus receive an empirical-theoretical meaning, i.e. their relationship with each other and the structural changes in the whole of society are more clearly discernible and, at the same time, allow a better understanding of the professional-bourgeois, urban, industrial society that followed this last non-bourgeois figuration.

The development of ambivalent charged relationships is,

for Elias, evidence that Marx's concept of class struggle "on clear examination to be, while not incorrect, certainly one-sided" (p. 103).

The sociological substance of this theory also involves the remark that not only the forms of organization change but the parties involved, the people interlinked in a long-term process, also do. Although the behavioural changes of the people are not yet the focus of this study, they are nonetheless already present. What one would call courtly culture is an "aspect of the development of courtly society as one distinctly marked elite formation in the whole social field" (HG, 280 f.). Their behaviour, speech, life and taste change and eventually become courtly etiquette. This then was to be followed by the parties involved, even though the latter sometimes saw it as a burden. They did so—this exemplifies the interdependencies of the people which is also reflected in the regulation of individual affects—"since every operation, each step constitutes a privilege of certain persons or families in relation to others" (HG, 310). Each change of a singular component of etiquette could have unforeseeable consequences. How strongly etiquette determined the life of the courtly people becomes clear in a central chapter in which Elias investigates "residential structures as indicators for societal structures". This is a chapter which must have been part of the postdoctoral thesis because Margarete Freudenthal quotes it in her doctoral thesis of 1934, in a passage in which she addresses the arrangement and style of representation rooms.

By tracing the immanent structure of a bygone epoch, Elias departs a bit from the political conflicts of the time. He goes back to the period before the industrialization which

was currently in the focus of the social sciences' research; he can thus also evade the constraints which then existed for the political engagement of social scientists. When he contrasts the professional-bourgeois society with the civilizing and cultural character of the courtly society, he wants to create an access to an improved understanding of currently existing cultures and civilizing forms of cohabitation.

Elias's access to the current problems is more indirect, historically straightened-out and thus allows a better self-dissociation from those problems which are associated with the life in the own society. By renouncing the direct access to current developments, the unprepared reader is not immediately addressed. This is an important difference from other coeval publications, for instance Herbert Marcuse who also engaged with problems of culture and society but focussed on capitalism. Even though Elias avoided contemporary problems until the 1980s, this by no means signified that his empirical-theoretical models were unsuitable to explain these or identify possible solutions. With his book "Humana conditio"<sup>18</sup> he had shown that he was perfectly able to extend his long-term analyses from bygone epochs into current problems of world politics. Moreover, the investigations in *Winston Parva*, which he conducted with John L. Scotson during his time as university teacher in Leicester,<sup>19</sup> clearly show that the ambivalent tensions between the different

18 Norbert Elias: *Humana conditio: observations on the development of humanity on the fortieth anniversary of the end of a war* (8 May 1985) In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 6, *The Loneliness of the Dying and Humana Condition*, UCD 2010, pp. 77–170.

19 Norbert Elias/John L. Scotson: *The Established and the Outsiders*, loc. cit.



powerful groups and persons could not only be found at the court of Ludwig XIV but also between the more powerful established and the less powerful groups of inhabitants.<sup>20</sup>

In his postdoctoral thesis, Elias still did a narrow investigation of the “Prozeß der Verhöflichung” (courtization process); later, as we will see, he examined the “Prozeß of Zivilisation” (civilization process) on a higher synthesis level. Elias stood at the start of a hopeful life as a university teacher. He had practically already taken the first steps with the doctoral degree and the postdoctoral thesis. Katharina Rutschky extended the path of life, hypothetically conceived by Margarete Freudenthal, and stated that she, in the meantime given emeritus status, would still have conducted seminars with Norbert Elias in the early 1960s. We know that nothing came of it. In 1934, after her doctorate, Freudenthal went to Palestine; Elias had already gone to France early in the summer of 1933. Before this, they had travelled together to Switzerland to explore possible career opportunities, but without any success. Freudenthal had seemingly attempted to convince Elias to go (together with her) to Palestine. In her autobiography she reports about a long talk with Elias, which had taken place in November or December 1932. For her, however, Elias turned out to be a “theoretical Zionist (which was already very much)”. He was one of those Zionists who are characterized thus in a joke: “Zionists are people who take the money of a second person to send a third person to Palestine”.<sup>21</sup>

20 For this see also Hermann Korte: Die etablierten Deutschen und ihre ausländischen Außenseiter. In: Materialienband II, loc. cit., pp. 261–279.

21 Margarete Sallis-Freudenthal: Ich habe mein Land gefunden, loc. cit., p. 117.

## The Sudden End

One cannot fully understand the incisive experience, i.e. the decision to go into exile in France, for Elias and his life planning without realizing how close he had already come to the goal he strove toward since the start of his studies: to become a professor at a German university. His postdoctoral qualifications were virtually completed. The thesis had been handed in, the faculty had determined Mannheim to be the examiner, and, upon Elias's application, the senior president of the Province Hessen-Nassau had communicated that he had no concerns regarding Elias's admission as private lecturer. He was only missing the probationary lecture, and then he could become a private lecturer and would thus be well on his way to a professorship, the Olympus of German scholarship.

Everything had started so well in Frankfurt, everything went according to plan, and then everything came to a sudden end. The probationary lecture did not take place. The appointment of Adolf Hitler as the Reich Chancellor and the assumption of power through the 'Enabling Act' quickly initiated activities aiming at the enforced conformity of the universities and their cleansing from Jews and critical scholars—primarily, but not only, Marxists.

But even now one seemed to not take too seriously the danger. The bourgeois arrogance simply could not imagine what catastrophe loomed under the leadership of Hitler. Kurt H. Wolff reported about a conversation with Mannheim in February 1933. He had coincidentally met Mannheim on the street and had approached him about this issue: one would probably have to leave now. Mannheim did not take this se-

riously, “because Hitler was so insane that he could not be able to get through more than six weeks”.<sup>22</sup> This was certainly not an individual misconception by Mannheim but expressed a general attitude to National Socialism and its leader that prevailed amongst intellectuals.

Soon the six weeks had passed. On 13 March, quite accurately six weeks after the assumption of power, the Institute for Social Research was closed. Only three weeks later the university decided to sever connections with the Institute. Along with the Institute of Social Research the Seminar for Sociology was closed. Now Mannheim went to England; he would have been suspended anyway from his duties in the course of the so-called ‘Gesetzes zur Wiederherstellung des Berufsbeamtentums’ (law for the restoration of civil service) based on ‘racial’ as well as political reasons.

Elias left Frankfurt a couple of weeks after Mannheim and first went to France. Like many others, he travelled with minor luggage. He was not yet sure what to do with himself. For the time being he held on to the willingly nourished hope that he could return in a while. But this, as we know today, came to nothing. The National Socialists further consolidated their power from month to month, and universities were brought into line, as it is said so well. The fate of the universities is reflected in a scene taking place in Heidelberg, which Alfred Weber narrated to Edgar Salin and which the latter recounted in a small recollection of his time in Heidelberg: “After the assumption of power, the student leader had summoned lectures and students to the great university

22 Kurt H. Wolff: *Wie ich zur Soziologie kam*, loc. cit., p. 325.

square, stepped on the balcony and commanded: ‘University Heidelberg! Stand to attention!’<sup>23</sup> And this was exactly what happened then—in Heidelberg and elsewhere.

23 Edgar Salin: Dem lebendigen Geist. In: Merian XX (1967), issue 2 (special issue on Heidelberg), pp. 78–84 (here: p. 84).

# Eighth Chapter

## The Great Book

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One has to do something new  
in order to see something new.  
Georg Christoph Lichtenberg

**I**t is part of the implicitness of everyday life that we eat with knife and fork. This has not always been the case. When, in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a Byzantine princess brought to her mouth the food, which was offered to her at the court of Venice, with the help of a small fork—made of gold and with two prongs—one was appalled. The scandal called into action the priests, who immediately conjured the punishment from the skies. This appears to have been successful, as she was soon infected with a severe illness. For the holy Bonaventure (c. 1217–1274) it was obvious that this was god’s chastisement for a person who did not want to eat god’s own food with her fingers.

Elias might have told this story in the same or a similar manner when, late in the autumn of 1935, he stayed as a

guest of his student friend Alfred Glucksmann and his wife in their house in Cambridge. It was his first visit with the friends who had organized an Englishman's letter enabling him to enter Great Britain. Glucksmann and Elias met as members of the Jewish youth movement in Breslau in 1918. Glucksmann mentions in his memories of the initial time with Elias "a common interest in Jewish problems".<sup>1</sup> In 1925 they met again in Heidelberg and became friends who engaged in a lively interchange of ideas. The physician Glucksmann dealt with problems of anatomy and development history and discussed with Elias and others philosophical, political and sociological problems of his research, whereby he apportioned special importance to the influence of his friend Elias.

Glucksmann had already fled to England in 1933 and was therefore able to help Elias in relocating from Paris to England. Now Elias paid his first visit to him and talked about his work. The anecdote of the Byzantine princess and the fork served him—as also on later occasions<sup>2</sup>—as an illustration to state clearly what he meant with the processes of civilization he had started to examine.

After he had fled to Paris, Elias had continued his scientific research. The circumstances were now more inconvenient and arduous as they had been in Frankfurt—I will return to this in the next chapter—but he, like many others, hoped for a speedy and happy end of Hitler's rule as well as

- 1 Alfred Glucksmann: Norbert Elias on his Eightieth Birthday. In: *Human Figurations*, loc. cit., pp. 9–10 (here: p. 9).
- 2 For example during the interview with Stanislas Fontain in *Le Nouvel Observateur* on 29 May 1974 (GS-Bd. 17, pp. 113–128).

for his own return to Frankfurt and did what he could: research work in order to keep pace with academia and to be able to soon continue his university career.

## **The Discovery of the Etiquette Books**

**E**lias took the material of his postdoctoral thesis and began extending this investigation of the development of nobility, royalty and courtly society. He did so in several respects. Firstly, he expanded the regional context. He juxtaposed the French development with that of England and Germany. Secondly, he found relevant empirical material in etiquette and guide books. He used all of it, and this is the third point, to devise theoretical insights that went beyond those of the postdoctoral thesis (for instance regarding the royal mechanism or on courtly behaviour). The sociogenesis of the state was contrasted with the psychogenesis of the individual.

Most important in this phase, however, was the discovery of the importance and usefulness of the etiquette books. It had already become apparent in his postdoctoral thesis that the behaviour according to courtly etiquette possessed functions for the social general context of the nobility and that the characteristics of emotions and feelings differed in the individual phases of societal development. Now Elias examined more precisely this fact and developed a model of the civilizing process. The preliminary result was the two volumes of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”. When Elias told the story of the fork to the Gluckmanns, he did this—as Alfred Glucksmann reports his memory—“to analyse the

process of civilisation”.<sup>3</sup> He might also have hinted at the differences between the use of the knife and the fork.

Since the early Middle Ages, there numerous instructions have existed of how to use the knife at table. In this context, however, one should not think of said historical ‘knife’ as similar to a modern table knife—that is having a blunt point and being just sharp enough to cut not-too-tough meat and soft vegetables. Back then it was rather a sharp and pointed dagger whose use at table was ever more regulated during the centuries, until it eventually disappeared completely and, emanating from the upper classes, gave way to the instruments we now call cutlery. Throughout the centuries one can observe that the people imposed ever more extensive restrictions, for instance the prohibition of aiming the point of the knife against other participants of the meal.

Remnants of such restrictions, which were meant to slowly transform a life-threatening weapon into an article of courtly etiquette, can be found even today. In Scandinavia, for instance, road signs announce guesthouses by depicting a crossed spoon and fork. Furthermore, in Swedish and Nordic households the knife is much less used than in Germany—where a crossed knife and fork are depicted on the corresponding road signs. This not only shows the long-term effects of past phases of the civilizing process but also evidences that there are nation-specific differences that have to and—thanks to Elias—can be explained.

3 Alfred Glucksmann: Norbert Elias on his eightieth birthday, loc. cit., p. 10.



The civilization regarding the use of the knife at table is a century-long process, which, with a bit of empathy, can also be comprehended by lay people. The taming of the individual's brutal aggressiveness in the courtly ceremonial, and later by bourgeois decency, accompanied the emergence of governmental power monopolies.

The case of the fork is slightly more complex. After all, the idea to eat greasy dishes from a shared bowl not with the fingers but with an instrument seems so obvious and reasonable that one does not suspect behind it a particular civilizing process that goes through considerations of usefulness. And yet, the introduction of the fork is connected to processual transformations in the individual's psyche.

In the chapter "Über den Gebrauch der Gabel beim Essen" ("On the use of the fork at table") Elias carefully considers the question why today it seems uncivilized, ill-bred and somehow barbaric-cannibalistic to us to bring to one's mouth food with the fingers. Superficially the reason is clear: doing so is unhygienic and unappetizing. These are the reasons, as Elias maintains, which belong to the category revulsion and shame, and it is the emergence of such affect controls that is exemplified by the introduction of the fork. Elias sees the reason why certain behaviour patterns were increasingly connected with feelings of reluctance in the slow, but resounding and far-reaching, transformation of the human subconscious. This led to a distancing from the own body and from others' bodies. "The fork", Elias writes, "is nothing other than the embodiment of a specific standard of emotions and a specific level of revulsion. Behind the change in eating techniques between the Middle Ages and modern times appears the same process that emerged in the analysis

of other incarnations of this kind: a change in the drive-and-affect economy” (p. 127).<sup>4</sup>

In this short passage—and this is a fundamental characteristic of Elias’s line of argument—we find two generalizing remarks. On the one hand, the indication that the civilization of customs had slowly rigidified from top to bottom, that is originating from a ‘close circle’ of courtly people to the whole of society. And on the other hand, this long-term civilizing process is repeated in the socialization of children today. This, however, works in a way that the behaviour, which is forced into the same mould and direction, appears to those who are growing up “as highly personal, something ‘inside’, implanted in them by nature” (p. 128).

The procedurally materialized standards is—and this is characteristic for the process of civilization—not understood as a foreign coercion but has become self-constraint, the compliance to which is assumed by individual control mechanisms which only seldom need extraneous support. That this process is never over and includes long-term transformations is self-evident because the stocktaking does not refer to the end of a process but to respective historic or current phases of a long-term process whose beginnings are as indeterminable as its end.

At the end of the short passage “Über den Gebrauch der Gabel beim Essen” (“On the use of the fork at table”) one finds a summary reflecting on many of the intentions and

4 The location of the quotes from “Norbert Elias: The Civilizing Process” in this chapter have been taken from the revised edition translated by Edmund Jephcott and edited by Stephen Mennell, Eric Dunning, Johan Goulsblom and Richard Kilminster in the *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 3, *On the Process of Civilisation*, Oxford 2000.

findings of the study. “Thus the socio-historical process of centuries, in the course of which the standard of what is felt to be shameful and offensive has been slowly raised, is re-enacted in abbreviated form in the life of the individual human being. If one wished to express recurrent processes of this kind in the form of laws, one could speak, as a parallel to the laws of biogenesis, of a fundamental law of sociogenesis and psychogenesis” (p. 128).

The above quote clarifies one of the basic rules followed by Elias. Societal provisions and individual procedures whose contents and forms, as well as their transformations, can only be adequately examined and understood when the long-term nature of the “socio-historical process of centuries” becomes the focus. One cannot say that this was only a methodical basic rule—this would erroneously limit the insight into the necessity of the examination of long-term societal transformations to an (although certainly existing) aspect. It is the observation of an empiric fact and at the same time also a theoretical statement.

Long-term developments can be condensed into universal process models—this is a position that is certainly not always shared in sociology. The same holds true for the therein contained determination that transformations are the normal in society, not the deviations from the societal norm, as structure-functional theories of social change claimed. It is not without irony and anger that Elias writes, as mentioned in the first chapter, in the introduction to the second edition of 1969 that sociology could have spared itself the false path of North-American systems theory regarding structural functional manifestation if it had in time taken note of his 1930s statements.

If one opens the first volume and in doing so skips the introduction to the second edition, one misses such fundamental information and explanations. Slightly unfamiliar to the reader of academic treatises, Elias starts not with the statement of his intentions, the presentation of his theoretical position and the research hypotheses derived from this, including particulars on the methodological approach. Rather he starts with a question of fact, more precisely questions on the actually existing circumstance, and develops, by expanding the questioning and the facts of the case, his conception, or—to say it more precisely—his conception successively presents itself to the reader. As Elias presents his conception with the factual material, it starts to take shape in the head of the reader. When one reviewing this operation, one is again and again surprised by Elias's linguistic possibilities and soon develops admiration for his certitude in accessing central points.

## **Transformation Phases and Class Struggles**

I have already partially recounted the content of the first chapter at the beginning of this book. I do not want to repeat this here but rather describe the beginning of the book and the development of the overarching question. Initially, it is demonstrated on the first page that the term civilization reflects the self-consciousness of the Christian Occident: “It sums up everything in which Western society of the last two or three centuries believes itself superior to earlier societies or ‘more primitive’ contemporary ones” (p. 15). Then this

seeming security is broken open by the remark that civilization did not have the same meaning in the various European nations. Such differences found expression, for instance, in the fact that Germans talked about culture instead of civilization.

The subsequent statements are then dedicated to the reasons, already mentioned in the first chapter, for the different meaning of the words civilization in English and French and the word culture in German. From this approach one can read off a further principle of the Eliasian method. By the means of comparison, he makes accessible for himself and his readers central points. Important elements and reasons for change can be found not only based on the comparison of different phases of a societal process but also by the juxtaposition of similar processes in various societies.

In this first chapter the etiquette books do not play any role, the focus is on the language and the significance its dissemination and poetry have. French is the language of the nobility, the courtly upper class. German does not have a good reputation; it is deemed crude, 'uncivilized'. There are actually hardly any national differences. Whether they are of German, French or English descent, the upper classes spoke French and had, as Elias writes in an essay on baroque poetry in 1987, a greater affinity for the members of the European courtly elite formations of other nations than for the members of the lower classes of the own country. It was no contradiction that one waged war against each other. "On the contrary", writes Elias, "war-like military behaviour is an aspect of the court civilization. The estates' sense of community felt by the courtly civilized people found expression in

the rituals of behaviour, no matter whether they met during war time or peace”.<sup>5</sup>

It is no surprise that the development of the German language had been a key point in the efforts of the bourgeoisie to obtain prestige and influence. This endeavour was not only hindered by the superiority of the French language but also by the fact that, in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Germany was a poor, wretched country ravaged by war. This completely differed from the situation in the neighbouring countries, for which the century brought about state power and societal wealth. Certainly, as Elias correctly pointed out in his *Civilizing* book, the literary movement—from Klopstock to Lessing, from the poets of the storm and stress to the Hainbund—was no political movement nor was it aimed at political actions. But it is, and Elias convincingly shows this, “in the fullest sense of the word [...] the expression of a social movement, a transformation of society” (p. 29).

On just a few pages, Elias thus sketches an arc from the apparently simple initial question to the problems with which sociologists have dealt since Comte and Marx. In the words of Elias, the revolutionary transition from feudalism to bourgeoisie as it was examined by many becomes a transition phase of long-term, societal developments. There is a certain distance in his examinations. He does not take sides, he does not judge, but he carves out the individual factors and slowly arrives at generalizing statements which he will later condense into models.

5 Norbert Elias: *Das Schicksal der deutschen Barocklyrik. Zwischen höfischer und bürgerlicher Tradition*. In: *Merkur* XXXXI (1987), p. 451–468 (here: p. 452), (GS-Bd. 16, p. 269)

Even that is present in Elias what Marx called class war. For instance, when he describes how the aspiring middle-class bourgeoisie, despite all its interest to break down the barriers that blocked the way up, at the same time meticulously makes sure that the lower strata remain barred from a social ascent. The class barriers of the bourgeoisie society are thus incorporated into the description, without a need to use the ideological combat term class, which it was and is in the sciences. Despite the shortness of the first chapter, Elias presents the problems of the ascending bourgeoisie more accurately than it was done in many a theory of the bourgeoisie society. That is to say, he also shows that the bourgeoisie, in its attempts to fight off the lower classes, remains caught up in a contradictory dilemma. This simultaneously answers the question why the nobility in Germany remained so powerful and influential for such a long period. “[L]ike any other middle class, this one was imprisoned in a peculiarly middle-class way: it could not think of breaking down the walls that blocked the way up, for fear that those separating it from the lower strata might also give way in the assault” (p. 30).

It was, in fact, initially the intelligentsia who, “being the first bourgeois formation in Germany, develop[s] an expressly bourgeois self-image, specifically middle-class ideas, and an arsenal of trenchant concepts directed against the courtly upper class” (p. 36). This “arsenal of trenchant concepts” was characterized by “das rein Geistige (the purely spiritual)” (ibid.). It evolved in the sciences and philosophy, religion and the fine arts. Already here the tendency to pull a thick line between education and culture finds expression “as the only one of genuine value, and the polit-

ical, economic and social sphere—in complete contrast to the watchwords of the rising bourgeoisie in France and England” (ibid.). Elias then continues and probably already has in mind the theory of state formation which then stood at the end of the second book: “The peculiar fate of the German bourgeoisie, its long political impotence, and the late unification of the nation acted continuously in one direction, reinforcing concepts and ideals of this kind” (p. 36).

From all this results a better understanding for the antithesis of civilization and culture, as it found expression, for instance, in the defamatory term ‘Zivilisationsliteraten’ [‘civilization literati’], coined by Thomas Mann. This sociological explanation alone would be worth reading but in the case of Elias it is only the leader to his actual project. He did not only want to examine impersonal objects, like civilization and culture, but diagnose and explain specific transformations of human beings. Gradually, he frees himself from the standard use of the term civilization and begins to call the reader’s attention to his real concern. That is, for instance, the intent to develop a better understanding of what is called civilization by consulting the experiences of the crisis of the 1920s/30s and the obvious relapse to barbaric forms of domination. He asks what civilization is all about and points out that it is accompanied by the emergence of individual specific hardships of civilization, i.e. burdens for the individuals which differ from those of former times of human existence. “But it cannot be said”, Elias writes, “that we already understand why we actually torment ourselves in such ways. We feel that we have got ourselves, through civilisation, into certain entanglements unknown to less civilized peoples; but we also know that these less



civilized people are for their part often plagued by difficulties and fears from which we no longer suffer, or at least not to the same degree. Perhaps all this can be seen somewhat more clearly if it is understood how such processes if civilisation actually take place” (p. 8).

Many an information can thus be taken from the introduction to the first edition. I find it fascinating, however, how one is led, little by little and even without knowledge of the introduction, to the central problem of the book and the intentions of the author when reading. After the socio-genesis of the terms culture and civilization has been dealt with, its differences and opposites have been presented and the turnover from social to national concepts has been described, Elias calls to attention an important circumstance at the end of the first chapter. Unlike at the beginning of the process, when design and modelling of the emotions were purposefully prepared and practiced, the late 18<sup>th</sup> century is characterized by a disappearance of the awareness regarding the preceding process of civilization. One accepts the contemporary behaviour as given; how it had been reached becomes uninteresting. “Its outcome was taken simply as an expression of their own higher gifts; the fact that, and the question of how, in the course of many centuries, civilised behaviour has been attained was of no interest” (p. 57).

## Psychogenesis and Psychoanalysis

Elias begins before this, at a point in time when the term civilization did not yet exist, and examines when it emerged, became ‘conscious’ and was eventually taken for granted. One could add here already that it becomes ‘unconscious’, even if Elias withholds this punchline for the time being at end of the first chapter. However, the following eleven sections of the second chapter, which fill up the rest of the volume, have as a topic not only “[c]ivilisation as a specific transformation of human behaviour”—as the title says—but also the modelling of what Freud called the ‘unconscious’. In the summary of the second volume, Elias states that “the general direction of the change in conduct, the ‘trend’ of the movement of civilisation, is everywhere the same. It always veers towards a more or less automatic self-control, towards the subordination of short-term impulses to the commands of an ingrained long-term view, and towards the formation of a more complex and secure ‘super-ego’ agency” (p. 419).

Except in the general findings of psychoanalysis, Elias above all takes up one of Freud’s concepts, which the latter had published in the context of his discussions about Marx and Marxism in the “Neuen Folge der Vorlesungen zur Einführung in die Psychoanalyse” (‘New Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis’). A process of civilization—Freud also uses the term culture—existed besides the development of economic necessities. In it, and by it, the drives’ goals are being shifted and thus experience and behaviour of the individuals changed. Freud writes about this: “If anyone were in a position to show in detail the way in which these different factors—the general inherited human disposition, its ra-

cial variations and its cultural transformations—inhibit and promote one another under the conditions of social rank, profession and earning capacity—if anyone were able to do this, he would have supplemented Marxism so that it was made into a genuine social science”<sup>6</sup>

Since the days of the conflict with his philosophy teacher Hönigswald, Elias had taken a particular interest in the history of humans and their consciousness: how did ideas develop in the course of history and how come that the Greeks experienced nature differently from the people of Romanticism, why do the so-called primitives see the tree as a ghost but we do not; why do the aristocrats subject themselves to a courtly ritual which, despite all their civilization, subjects them to significant constraints? These are all questions Freud cannot or does not attempt to answer. But yet Elias states “how much this study owes to the discoveries of Freud and the psychoanalytical school” (p. 570). In the same context he also maintains that there were “not inconsiderable differences between the whole approach of Freud and that adopted in this study” (ibid.).

How much does Elias owe to Freud? Two indications in the latter’s studies have always been important for Elias. Firstly, all inner compulsion, all self-compulsion in the history of humankind, had initially been external compulsion, foreign compulsion; and secondly, that the psychogenetic development of every individual is, in a sense, the repetition of the history of humankind in the individual person. And the differences? Elias is especially interested in the long-

6 Sigmund Freud: *New Introductory Lectures*. In: *Complete Psychological Works*, Vol. XXII. London 1964, p. 179.

term developments of constraints under a sociological perspective, the sociogenesis, and furthermore he uses a different empirical material.

Freud's method to note and then evaluate the utterings of the patients, which he applied during his search for the repressed processes of affect modelling in the individual, seemed to have no value for Elias. He had to look for other material that would enable him to work out the long-term process of civilization as a process of transformation of external compulsions. It had to be material from which the long-term transformations of the humans' inner nature could be shown. Elias found this material in the etiquette books. This is the actual reason for the detailed discussion of the miscellaneous manners. As amusing as the chapters on transformations of the rules of conduct during meal—in terms of the natural needs, when blowing the nose and spitting, in the bedroom, and with regard to the relations between men and women—may be, the purpose of the presentation is a very specific one. Elias uses all the material he presents to demonstrate, as a quasi-time lapse, the long-term relocation of the compulsions from external to internal.

According to his report, it was not until his stay in England, more precisely in the tradition-steeped reading room of the British Museum—here, Marx wrote, i.e., his “Capital”—that the thought entered his mind to evaluate the etiquette books in this manner. With some of them he was already familiar; the representation of the etiquette rules at the absolutist French court had necessitated the perusal of them. But it was only in the comparison of temporally disparate editions of several etiquette books, which, like everything that had been printed until then, could be found in

this extraordinary library, that he had the ingenious inspiration to use the material in a similar way how psychoanalysts used the recordings of the patient consultations: that is to visualize the processes of drive regulation of affects and emotions.

This has already been addressed in the example of using knife and fork. Elias was not interested in the cultural-historical surface of the behavioural changes. Not the changes of the behavioural standards are important but to what extent the development and transformations of the boundaries of revulsion and shame and the pushing back of aggressive drives can be proved as the expression of the general process of the shift of compulsions from external to internal.

It is one of the common misunderstandings which Elias's piece is exposed to—one could even say it is 'the' misunderstanding par excellence—that it is time and again classified, and treated, as a historico-cultural study. Some things may have inadvertently contributed to this; in particular the fact that the first volume was published on its own in 1939, and that initially only the translation of the first volume was published in the US in 1977.

But this alone does not suffice to explain the misunderstanding 'cultural history'. If one reads the first volume with at least a bit of mindfulness, this assessment, which may emerge at the beginning of the volume, cannot be upheld. Already the discussion of the terms culture and civilization should draw attention, but above all the individual chapters on the rules of conduct which each also contain generalizing statements and gradually work towards a theoretical model definitely do so. This is characteristic for the Eliasian mode of operation. It comprised a constant change between

empirical analysis and theoretical modelling and vice versa. Also, the introduction contained—like the annotations do—enough statements on what would today be called the central epistemic interest.

Nevertheless, the misunderstanding persists. One time Elias is classified as a cultural historian, at other times as a 'historical' sociologist. The first denotation predominantly originates from sociologists, the second from historians. In both cases the intention is clear. The classification serves to justify the failure to deal with it or substantiate its irrelevance for the own subject. Interestingly, the misunderstandings can be mostly found amongst sociologist and historians, and less with psychologists, for whom the method seems to be the most obvious. Even among sociologists and historians there are by now adequate forms of engagement with Elias. One can observe, however, that the more one gets closer to the powerful central theories and their representatives the more the misunderstandings increase.

This is based on the fact that, for the first time in this book and subsequently again and again, Elias had given a detailed explanation of his demand for a paradigm shift: from a statistical perspective on the social system to the examination of long-term processes, from the individual discipline to interdisciplinary human-scientific examinations on higher synthesis levels, away from the perception of the individual acting human towards the figuration of interwoven humans, away from the one-dimensionality of historical-materialistic analysis and models towards the social science that overcomes the boundaries of disciplines. All this has to challenge the powerful central theories of sociology and history, in parts as well as in the whole. Since the Eliasian perfor-

mance also lay in the achievement of a relatively high synthesis level, one cannot confront the challenges by the, now customary, way of eclectic annexation. What remains is the dismissive labelling that can be encountered time and again amongst the northern American sociologists, if they have even heard the name Elias. Or one stays well clear of Elias's works, like the two other fixed stars of the German sociologists' heaven, Jürgen Habermas and Niklas Luhmann, have done.

## **Changes in the Attitudes Towards the Relations Between Men and Women**

**T**he excursion into forms of reception or, even better, non-reception could be continued. However, at this point, I want to continue with the manner in which Elias used the empirical material of the etiquette books in order to develop his process theory using the example of civilization and what the most important findings were. I have already talked about eating habits. Out of the multitude of other examples, I want to discuss the changes in the attitudes towards the relations between men and women.

A large part of the corresponding section (pp. 166–185) is dedicated to the so-called colloquia of Erasmus of Rotterdam. The introduction to life, which Erasmus had initially written for the eight-year-old son of his publisher, was published for the first time in 1522 and, over the next two centuries, saw ever new editions with wide circulation. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century the criticism intensified, because in the meantime a distinct change had happened in all areas of life.

It was now no longer taken for granted to write about, for instance, prostitutes and their houses in educational journals for adolescents. At the times of Erasmus, these were part of the public life. Now, in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century they did continue to exist, but they were virtually hidden behind the scenes. During the Middle Ages nothing was hidden from the children. Now areas of secrecy emerged in the household, a wall was erected in front of the children, which sealed off the adolescent from every manifestation of sexuality and the associated practices.

During the Middle Ages, it went without saying that, after a wedding, the bridal couple was accompanied to the marital bed by relatives and guests, undressed with the help of those present and then the bed was ‘taken.’ Towards the end of the Middle Ages, as Elias reports, this slowly changed. At first the bridal couple lie down fully clothed on their marital bed. Afterwards, this also stopped. That today some of the bridal couples are accompanied to the door of their bedroom or even only to their apartment—the groom then carries his bride over the threshold and closes the door behind them—is part of this long-term process of the erection of revulsion and shame boundaries in the interaction with human sexuality.

In his examination of the sociogenesis and psychogenesis of marriage procedures from the 12<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, Michael Schröter has taken up Elias’s work and investigated early forms of the formal matrimony common today.<sup>7</sup> The

7 Michael Schröter: “Wo zwei zusammenkommen in rechter Ehe ...”. Sozio- und psychogenetische Studien über Eheschließungsvorgänge vom 12. bis 15. Jahrhundert. Mit einem Vorwort von Norbert Elias, Frankfurt/Main 1985.



sociogenesis of marriage contains important elements of the changing power balance between man and woman, parents and son/daughter as well as the reduction of neighbourly control in favour of a new relation of external and internal controls. “With the decreasing power of the family and neighbour groups, the responsibility for these drive controls is increasingly pushed towards the individual human; self-apparatuses are erected which perform these tasks. Developments of an increasing individualization of weddings, up to the choice of the partner and the increasing repression of sexuality, are two sides of the same medal”.<sup>8</sup>

Already as this point, we see that the slow shift from external to internal control is accompanied by the elaboration of governmental and, in this particular case, clerical regulations. Initially weddings are processes between “family representatives”. “The personally established integration units of the kinship, domination, neighbourhood function as singular and last units of social control”.<sup>9</sup> After the 13<sup>th</sup> century the familial, neighbourly marriage is replaced by clerical-governmental wedding ceremonies. “In a word, one cannot understand the introduction of the priestly wedding ceremony, if one does not understand it as an expression of the progress on the way to state formation, which probably always and everywhere takes place at the expense of the power of family associations”.<sup>10</sup>

8 Loc. cit., pp 397 f.

9 Loc. cit., p. 380.

10 Loc. cit., pp. 386 f.

## **Civilizing and Drive Regulation: The Separation of Intimate and Public Sphere**

**A**t the end of the subchapter on the changes in the attitudes towards the relations between men and women, Elias writes: “The trend of the civilising movement towards the stronger and stronger and more complete ‘intimisation’ of all bodily functions, towards their enclosure in particular enclaves, to put them ‘behind closed doors’, has diverse consequences. One of the most important, which has already been observed in connection with various other forms of drives, is seen particularly clearly in the case of the development of civilising restraints on sexuality. It is the peculiar division in human beings which becomes more pronounced the more sharply those aspects of human life that may be publicly displayed are divided from those that may not, and which must remain ‘intimate’ or ‘secret’. [...] In other words, with the advance of civilisation the lives of human beings are increasingly split between an intimate and a public sphere, between private and public behaviour. And this split is taken so much for granted, becomes so compulsive a habit, that it is hardly perceived in consciousness” (pp. 184–185).

Elias described the transformation of human behaviour, the sensations and affects as part of the process of civilization. Civilization is first of all the long-term conversion of the external into internal compulsions. It is a long-term process that does not proceed in a target-oriented manner but whose past structure and direction can be examined, outlined and used for the prognosis of future phases of societal development.

The uncovering of this process of civilization and the model of the long-term transformations of the affects and the drives alone would have been a pioneering achievement and should be classified as a great and innovative accomplishment in the history of sociology. For a time, there was a tendency in the reception of this approach to be satisfied by this. In particular because it seemed to offer a sought-for access to psychoanalysis that did not necessitate the inclusion of the own psyche of the individual scholar. These attempts, made predominantly by younger social scientists, were not lasting. After all, the psychoanalysis could not be bogarted that easily. Furthermore, it soon became apparent that, despite all significance of the presented model of the civilizing process, Elias's actual achievement was that his process theory depicted the relation between the long-term transformations of the individuals and the long-term transformations of the society, which was constituted by the many individuals.

Doing so, the term 'relation' is not sufficient to adequately describe the matter of fact portrayed by Elias. Rather, to be precise, one would have to speak of intertwining. The term relation tempts to prematurely presume unilateral connections or impute hierarchical or temporal sequences in the sense of a 'firstly—secondly' or 'important—less important'. However, the transformations of the behavioural standards of the individual in the development of human society are interwoven—and vice versa (to secure this wording from misinterpretations). I would like to explain this using an example that makes up part of the second chapter of "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation": the formation of stable central organs in the form of power and tax monopolies.

## Competition and Interdependence

The formation of stable central organs is a process of socioeconomic function sharing and state formation, which can also be identified by the terms ‘competition’ and ‘interdependence’. The evolvement of medieval feudal societies into European absolutist states is one section of an unplanned process of civilization that was structured for the long run. When Elias starts his analysis of the occidental state formation with the central-European feudal societies of the early Middle Ages, one may not understand this as the beginning of the development, as the zero point. Even this developmental step has predecessors: this is why it is so difficult to determine its definite beginning.

In contrast to the later European development phases, the early phase is shaped by the dominance of barter economy, the low degree of money use, the trade links, the division of labour, and a low degree of state formation and pacification. Here, the latter is characterized in particular by the low degree of the monopolization of psychological violence and, correspondingly, a high degree of physical threats and continuous insecurity of the individual.

In this historical situation the king, or a comparable central ruler, is not superior to the territorial lords with regard to his military and economic strength. “In keeping with the economic structure, the apparatus for ruling in this stage of social development was unlike that of ‘states’ in a later stage” (p. 227). “On the one hand the kings were forced to delegate power over part of their territory to other individuals. The state of military, economic and transport arrangements at that time left them no choice. Society offered them

no sources of money taxes sufficient for them to keep a paid army or paid official delegates in remote regions. To pay or reward them they could only allocate them land” (p. 228).

He, who is constantly under threat, cannot plan far ahead; for him, who has to constantly fight, the civilizing of the aggressiveness is dangerous or even lethal. External compulsions shape the life of the humans in this phase of development. But it is this commitment to fight, this competition with others, from which springs the dynamic of the development that cannot be systematically controlled by the individual participants but in which they are integrated, with which they are interwoven.

In prolonged times of peace, the compulsion to equip the soldiers with landownership, when it coincides with low degrees of the king’s potential influence on autonomy and autarky efforts of smaller territorial lords, results in many centres of power and thus also to a united perspective against the central ruler. It was only by the more or less great pressure on the territorial lords, that the king could reinforce his own interests against their claims. Since in many situations he did not have at his command the necessary instruments of power, he was practically dependent on the motivation of his vassals. In contrast to later societal phases, the property situations were shaped by a high degree of stability of the central institution’s apparatus of power, the actual individual strength—i.e. the physical violence of the individual, their power of disposition over the land and their dependence on services. The legal system was thus still strongly individualized.

In the Middle Ages, the socioeconomic conditions for this intertwining were constituted by barter and domestic

economy. Barter economy is here understood as a close coupling of goods extractions and consumption without intermediate trade and, above all, without money.

“The structure of the central organs corresponds to the structure of the division and interweaving of functions. The strength of the centrifugal tendencies towards local *political autarky* within societies based predominantly on a barter economy corresponds to the degree of local *economic autarky*” (p. 238). It is only by socioeconomic processes, i.e. the extension of the route from good extraction to consumption and the associated need for the introduction of money, that this mechanism of feudalization can be overridden.

As a result of the emerging monetary economy, the socioeconomic differentiations of the societal functions, like the interdependence of feudal territories, increase; this leads to an increasing necessity of a central state administration. In Central Europe the development dynamic inherent in this situation, together with the increasing population, solidification of landownership and difficulties with the outward expansion, result in fiercer competition, i.e. in armed conflicts over subsistence and production means in the interior—whereby individual counts and knights could not evade social compulsion, if they did not want to sooner or later become dependent or be defeated.

This long-term, unplanned social process of state formation initially results in a reduction of the number of competitors, then to a monopoly position of individual counts and eventually to the forming of absolutist state with the monopolization of physical violence through the institutions of kingship. The process of state formation is interwoven with processes of socioeconomic function division, the transi-

tion from barter economy to money economy, the increase of labour division, the trade links, the urbanization and thus with the social upward mobility of the bourgeoisie, the third estate.

But it is also interwoven with the other strand of the civilizing process, the transformation of the physical structures of the involved people. Just as the creation of violence-free rooms is the prerequisite for a systematic, long-term oriented economic calculability and planning or for the market-oriented production of goods, the early processes of commercializing and the early industrializing via the tax monopoly of the central rulers led to an increase of their income, to the possibility of recruiting mercenaries, developing new weapon technologies, as well as generally increasing their chances to be able to expand their monopoly on power or secure their authority. For the small and middle nobility the expansion of money economy meant an increase in prices and thus, with a simultaneous decay of the fixed ground rent, a decrease in their income. This meant the slow loss of the instruments of power, the efficient use of weapons and thus of the power. In this way, the nobility became increasingly dependent: former free soldiers and feudatories become courtiers and court officials. At this point, it becomes evident why Elias had already dealt so extensively with the courtly people and their etiquette in his post-doctoral thesis and in the process book.

## Civilization Processes and State Formation Processes

The shift from external to internal compulsions: nothing else is meant when courtly behaviour is talked about. Now one has to make plans instead of fighting. The state's power monopoly allows for long-term perspectives and, correspondingly, long chains of action. The courtly people are the first who practice a behaviour that is based on long-term perspectives, calculations and self-control. They are, in this sense, the first 'modern' people of a new time—or, in other words, for some centuries, the courtly society constituted the 'model workshop' of legitimate behavioural patterns.

This process may have progressed differently in the individual Central European societies, but, so Elias writes, "however these differences may arise in particular cases, the general discussion of change in conduct, the 'trend' of the movement of civilisation, is everywhere the same. It always veers towards a more or less automatic self-control ...". This passage was already quoted above, albeit incompletely. After the sociogenetic strands of the civilizing progress have been outlined, the quote can now be completed: "It always veers towards a more or less automatic self-control, towards the subordination of short-term impulses to the commands of an ingrained long-term view, and towards the formation of a more complex and secure 'super-ego' agency. And broadly the same, too, is the manner in which this necessity to subordinate momentary affects to more distant goals is propagated and spread; everywhere small leading groups are affected first, and then broader and broader strata of Western society" (p. 419).



The emergence of power and tax monopolies, which are further refined in the course of the European development of the monopolies on planning tools and knowledge, are summarized by Elias in the model of the monopoly process. A central, rightly oftentimes cited passage describes and explains this process of monopolization thus: “If, in a major social unit, a large number of the smaller social units which, through their interdependence, constitute the larger one, are of roughly equal social power and are thus able to compete freely—unhampered by pre-existing monopolies—for the means to social power, i.e. primarily the means of subsistence and production, the probability is high that some will be victorious and others vanquished, and that gradually, as a result, fewer and fewer will control more and more opportunities, and more and more units will be eliminated from the competition, becoming directly or indirectly dependent on an ever-decreasing number. The human figuration caught up in this movement will therefore, unless countervailing measures are taken, approach a state in which all opportunities are controlled by a single authority: a system with open opportunities will become a system with closed opportunities” (p. 303).

Elias describes—I have pointed this out many times—not the final state of the civilizing process. This process of monopolization, too, does not constitute the endpoint but rather contains specific development dynamic. The increasing tendencies towards dependence in turn strengthen the dependents’ role as a collective. From a certain dimension of his territory the monopolist is no longer in the position to govern without his subordinates’ willingness to cooperate. “[T]he more comprehensive a monopoly position becomes

and the more highly developed its division of labour, the more clearly and certainly does it move towards a point at which its one or more monopoly rulers become the central functionaries of an apparatus composed of differentiated functions, more powerful than others, perhaps, but scarcely less dependent and fettered” (p. 305).

From a certain degree of property accumulation, the monopolist is forced by the high degree of socioeconomic function differentiation and heightened dependence on the services of others to carry out a distribution of properties, for instance, in the modern form of wage payment. This, in turn, starts a competitive struggle for the related chances, which, through the structural changes of the society, has acquired a bound character, controlled and directed character by monopolists. The monopolization of physical violence and of the tax revenue leads to structural changes of the allocation battles, for example in the present form of tariff disputes. Through the increasing socioeconomic differentiation of the society the central organ, on the one hand, acquires a character of a “supreme co-ordinator and regulator for the functionally differentiated figuration at large” (p. 349); on the other hand, the increasing interdependence of the humans fosters its transformation into a necessary, no longer dissolvable instance. As much as we are today weary of the coordinating organ state and its bureaucracy (the regulation organs), without state and bureaucracy the existence of state-of-the-art, i.e. strongly functionalized and differentiated societies, is no longer imaginable. The formation of stable tax monopolies and power monopolies, i.e. the socio-genesis of the Central European states, is complementary to an increasing socioeconomic function differentiation, an in-

creasing intertwining and a specific, psychological development of the humans who constitute these instances of intertwining.

At the beginning of the presentation of this segment of state formation processes, I have claimed that one could identify it by the terms ‘competition’ and ‘interdependence’. The fact of competition has surely become more evident but may be it is useful to add a couple of words about interdependence. To be more concrete—as always with Elias—it should be: the interdependence of people. The development dynamic that is inherent to the situation of competition can make an impact only because the people involved are interdependent. They cannot think or act without other people. I want to remind the readers of the entrepreneur Mehrländer, who was introduced in the fourth chapter “Childhood, youth, maturation” in the context of Elias’s occupation in the industry. This entrepreneur, too, had a fixation on his competitors and developed from his interdependence with the competition his business policy.

## **In the Centre of Sociology: People and Their Intertwinings**

**T**he process of civilization is powered by the competition for power by interdependent people and groups of people. Elias writes: “[F]ear of loss or reduction of social prestige is one of the most powerful motive forces in the transformation of constraints by others into self-restraints” (p. 436). It is therefore the interdependence of the people which determines the civilizing process and, as Elias notes, imposes “an

order *sui generis*”. It is “an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it. It is this order of interweaving human impulses and strivings, this social order, which determines the course of historical change; it underlies the process of civilization” (p. 404) and, it must be added, all societal changes.

This allows sociology to draw conclusions, of which the most important is that humans, and the social intertwining they constitute, have to be at the centre of all research: “The ‘circumstances’ that change are not something which comes upon men from ‘outside’: they are the relationships between people themselves” (p. 444).

In contrast to Max Weber—who also examined long-term developments of, e.g., rationalization, the emergence of central domination or the formation of towns—Elias did not formulate an abstract theory of action that put aside the people. He also avoids the labelling of ‘social’ action, which, in the case of Max Weber, occasionally caused bafflement. Elias always focussed on the people with their emotional or rational life statements, sometimes cohabiting peacefully, sometimes antagonistically. From this results a complex network of action that brings forth developments that perhaps none of the concerned people had planned like that: “[T]his intertwining of the actions and plans of many people, which, moreover, goes on continuously from generation to generation, is itself not planned. It cannot be understood in terms of the plans and purposeful intentions of individuals, nor in terms which, though not directly purposive, are modelled on teleological modes of thinking. We are here concerned with processes, compulsions and regularities of a relatively autonomous kind” (p. 591).

In contrast to May Weber, for Elias this is no reason for pessimism. He does not share Max Weber's escape from the 'stahlharten Gehäuse' (iron cage, or rather steel shell) of modern rationality and bureaucratic domination. It is only in the cohabitation with other people that the individuality of the individual can unfold: "The coexistence of the people, the intertwining of their intentions and plans, the bonds they place on each other, all these, far from destroying individuality, provide the medium in which it can develop. They set the individual limits, but at the same time give him greater or lesser scope" (p. 543).

## **The Loss of the Process Character: Misunderstandings of the Figuration Term**

Inspired by his basic insights, which had been elaborated and pursued in detail in the later works—above all I would like to mention his book "Was ist Soziologie?" ('What is Sociology?') and the essay "Zur Grundlegung einer Theorie sozialer Prozesse" ('Towards a theory of social processes')<sup>11</sup>—in the 1970s it has become common practice to speak of an Eliasian figurational sociology. In particular in the Netherlands this designation was the name of choice; furthermore, a working group of the Dutch sociology association was designated thus. Apparently this was done with

11 Norbert Elias: Towards a theory of social processes. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 16, Essays III. On sociology and the humanities, pp. 9–39.

the aim to find an accurate designation for this new approach, one that is distinguishable from other sociological directions. But this designation was also introduced in Germany. For instance, those interested in Eliasian work met in 1980 at the 20<sup>th</sup> German Congress of Sociology in Bremen in an ad-hoc group labelled “Zivilisationsprozeß und Figurationssoziologie”.

Elias never used the term ‘figurations’ in “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”. When he gave his introductory lecture in Münster in 1965, he spoke of configurations. It was only at the beginning of the 1970s that he began to speak of figurations to set himself apart from the term configuration which was common in biology. Though he had accepted the labelling ‘figurational sociology’ fairly without comment, at the event of said ad-hoc group he had talked about “Soziale Prozeßmodelle auf mehreren Ebenen” (social process models on several levels).

The designation ‘figurational sociology’ tempts one to lose sight of thinking in processes and to, either unknowingly and accidentally or deliberately and purposefully, withdraw from this task that continues to be difficult for sociologists. In particular, this designation leads to misunderstandings by third parties. The most fulminant example is provided by Hartmut Esser in his attempt to determine not only similarities but also commonalities between the ahistorical methodological individualism and the process theory.<sup>12</sup> Esser concentrated on the supposedly separately existing “figurational

12 Hartmut Esser: Figurationssoziologie und Methodologischer Individualismus: Zur Methodologie des Ansatzes von Norbert Elias. In: KZfSS XXXVI (1984), pp. 667–702.

sociology” and abstained from explaining the process character of the figurations.

Esser’s attempt may not even have been meant unkind or derogatorily-critically, but, fixated on his methodological basic rules, the actual scientific charm of the Eliasian process theory evaded him. At least this instance had as a consequence that Elias, in a kind of silent protest, published a commentary on Karl Popper’s “Logik der Forschung” (“The Logic of Scientific Discovery”),<sup>13</sup> which was one of the foundations of Esser’s methodology. Out of this evolved a vociferous controversy that was joined, besides Esser,<sup>14</sup> by Hans Albert,<sup>15</sup> quite rightly called the ‘German Popper’, and other positivists. The critical counterarguments prompted Elias to compose another contribution to the discussion with the—as he called them—“reality blind philosophers”,<sup>16</sup> in which he explained the foundations of a human science that necessarily distinguishes itself from the natural sciences.

13 Norbert Elias: On the creed of a nominalist. Observations on Popper’s ‘The Logic on Scientific Discovery’. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 14, *Essays I. On the sociology of knowledge and the sciences*, UCD 2009, pp. 161–190.

14 Hartmut Esser: *Logik oder Metaphysik der Forschung? Bemerkungen zur Popper-Interpretation von Elias*. In: *ZfS XIV* (1985), pp. 257–264.

15 Hans Albert: *Mißverständnisse eines Kommentators. Zu Norbert Elias, Das Credo eines Metaphysikers. Kommentare zu Poppers “Logik der Forschung”* (*ZfS 2/1985*). In: *ZfS XIV* (1985), pp. 265–267.

16 Norbert Elias: *Science or sciences? Contribution to a debate with reality-blind philosophers*. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 14, *Essays I. On the sociology of knowledge and the sciences*, UCD 2009, pp. 191–211.

## Attempts of Critique

One has to admit that, if compared to some of the other attempts of critique regarding Elias, the described disputes took place at a high level. Said other attempts were usually—and surely not coincidentally—directed against his theory of the long-term, unplanned changes of the human psyche. Artur Bogner accurately discussed this critique when he stated that the charge against Elias, heard again and again, which accuses him of having neglected the emergence of “consciousness-accessible norms”<sup>17</sup> or “the flexible and ego-accessible internalization of norms that originated from insight”,<sup>18</sup> rather reflected the critics’ ‘petition principii’. Apart from the fact that Elias had not claimed an exclusively unconscious transformation of the external to internal constraints, the critical intellectuals could not even imagine unconscious norm formation. Bogner answered this by declaring that “an ‘ego-accessible internalization’ that ‘originates from insight’ takes away from the Freudian term the very stinger, which consist precisely in the notion that the internalized components are highly incomplete or not accessible at all for the consciousness”.<sup>19</sup>

17 Andreas Wehowski: *Uns beweglicher machen als wir sind—Überlegungen zu Norbert Elias*. In: *Ästhetik und Kommunikation VIII* (1977), H. 30, pp. 8–18 (here: p. 10).

18 Axel Honneth, Hans Joas: *Soziales Handeln und menschliche Natur. Anthropologische Grundlagen der Sozialwissenschaften*. Frankfurt (Main)/New York 1980, p. 119.

19 Artur Bogner: *Zivilisation und Rationalisierung. Ein Vergleich der Zivilisationstheorien Max Webers, Norbert Elias’, Max Horkheimers und Theodor W. Adornos*. Doctoral thesis. Bielefeld 1986, pp. 74 f.



Likewise forthrightly, and justifiably so, Bogner rejects another, often stated and heard objection. Elias, also heard again and again, neglects both the bourgeoisie and the phase of capitalism, i.e. the main fields of sociological interest since the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Both main directions of German sociology, Marxism on the one hand, Max Weber's sociology on the other, were based on assumptions of a fundamental difference between the era of bourgeoisie and the era of capitalism and the periods prior to that date. When Elias's concentration on courtly societies was now criticized as the "negligence" of bourgeoisie, this, for Bogner, "turned the historic and systematic context of his discourse upside down. It is foremost polemic intention that Elias's analysis puts a focus on the aristocracy—as a corrective against the mainstream of sociological thinking, which too exclusively regards the bourgeoisie the creator of the modern world".<sup>20</sup>

Whenever possible, one should read in their entirety the books one criticizes. Mere browsing and imposition of hands does not suffice. They who completely read "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation", find, in particular towards the end of the second volume and in the annotations, many a useful hint that explains Elias's approach even for those who still struggle to understand it. At the time of the drafting this was certainly only a small number. In general one was educated and skilled enough to recognise the critical direction of a study without further indications. The intellectual-academic milieus were still closely interwoven; and if one contemplates Elias's biography and knows the several stations of his academic life, one can understand that he could gen-

20 Ibid., pp. 68 f.

erally dispense with relevant notes, like he had done in his postdoctoral thesis, which contains only sporadic annotations of this kind.

But one cannot say that it was missing annotations that satisfy the critical readers. This also applies to the accusation that he had disregarded the bourgeoisie. “We often find”, writes Elias in the second volume, “firmly lodged in the minds of our contemporaries the idea that the bourgeoisie was the ‘originator’ or ‘inventor’ of more rational thought. Here, for the sake of contrast, certain rationalisation processes in the aristocratic camp have been described”. So that no one could draw the incorrect conclusion, Elias only replaced the bourgeoisie with the aristocracy, he continues: “Changes of this kind, however, do not ‘originate’ in one class or another, but arise in conjunction with the tensions *between* different functional groups in a social field and *between* the competing people within them” (p. 455).

In this chapter I have attempted to present important insights and findings of “the great book”. I have dispensed with a comprehensive summary because this cannot be done adequately on 30 to 40 pages. Either this presentation is so general that nothing can be recognized from it or it is so distorted that the Eliasian account seems violated. Civilizing, monopolization and state formation certainly are a main strand of argument, but only an excerpt. There are further content-related focal points (e.g. the significance of population development) and many hints at the dispute with the sociology of the time (like, for instance, Max Weber’s ideal type), which provide additional arguments for reading the entire book by oneself. This chapter cannot, and does not want to, substitute for the individual perusal of the book.

At the end of this chapter two questions are followed up. These are questions often asked in discussions of the Eliasian work. Firstly, it is often unclear how his process theory of the European civilization can be applied to contemporary problems. Secondly, it is often asked what significance the Eliasian process theory has for sociology or the social sciences in general, what are its roots and what distinguishes Elias from other social-scientific authors of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The difficulty sociologists have with the application of Elias's suggestions, and with this we address the first question, is founded in the fact that they are normally used to working with abstract terms. This becomes most evident in Max Weber's ideal types, which are abstract descriptions of a possible reality. They are conceptual constructions which sociologists believe they have to devise to put in order an ambiguous environment. Max Weber distances himself from reality with his ideal types, hoping to obtain insight into and comprehension of societal relations with the help of abstractions. They are in part based on extensive empirical studies but are abstractions which do not face reality.

## **A New Level of Synthesis**

**I**f one interprets Eliasian terms like monopoly mechanism, civilizing process and state formation in this traditional way as abstractions, one obstructs the access to an application to contemporary problems of societal development. Elias's terms are not the result of empiric-analytical generalizations but the result and substantial expression of

his synthesis capacity. Scientific synthesis, in the way Elias understands it, is the connection of historical studies, psychoanalytical theory and sociological conceptions and other social-scientific research approaches. This is not a methodological end in itself or a standard but refers to an appropriate explanation of societal relations. If one follows his individual works, starting with his study days, one can see how he expands the frame of his synthesis, its range, and simultaneously achieves ever higher stages of integration of different parts of explanation and thus arrives at increasingly better explanations. With this, he is more successful in working out the actual order of long-term structural changes than with any analytical method. However, he does not distance himself from reality with this but, in contrast, comes increasingly closer to it.

They who follow this way should not artificially reduce their innovative work results and suggestions and misunderstand them as “abstractions”. They are the “working framework” for further “synthesis-guided examinations”<sup>21</sup> of yet not sufficiently explained problems. These problems include that in the course of societal development the social sciences are increasingly troubled by mustering up sufficient distance to their research object—i.e. the society in which they committedly live. Certainly this is achieved much better today than in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, but even today the orientation towards the distanced behaviour is not yet sufficiently, and additionally only differently, developed. The conceptual pair “involvement and detachment”, formulated by Elias for this

21 Herbert J. Schubert: *Zeit als Instrument der Sozialforschung*. Frankfurt/Main 1987, p. 84.

problem, is precisely not an abstraction but the synthesis of manifold examinations on different levels. The conceptual pair is comprehensive enough to describe the overall problem, and it is at the same time a request for further work.

This, too, distinguished Elias from traditional sociology. His terms are not to be understood as final communications. Formulations like that by Max Weber—which sums up the result of the state formation process by maintaining that “[a] compulsory political organization with continuous operations (*politischer Anstaltsbetrieb*) will be called a ‘state’ insofar as its administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the *monopoly* of the *legitimate* use of physical force in the enforcement of its order”<sup>22</sup>—such ostensibly final definitions cannot be found in Elias. Unlike Max Weber, he does not name “basic sociological terms” with which one can supposedly order the supposed disorder of societal relations but identifies basic problems of humans and the society they form together. And, therefore, the conceptual pair “involvement and detachment” is problem-oriented and open to further work—for studies which do not serve the improvement of the term but sharpen the eye for the process-like transformation of the society and which attempt to better understand the explainable reasons for the transformation.

Some of what has been written to answer the first question can be used for the clarification of the second. This becomes most evident by way of the example of the term synthesis. On the one hand, it describes an avenue of research without developing a determining terminology; on the other

22 Max Weber: Basic Sociological Terms. In: *Economic and Society*, ed. by Günther Roth and Claus Wittich. Berkeley 1968, pp. 3–62, here p. 54.

hand, it clarifies the special features of the Eliasian human science and the differences to the existing social-scientific positions and approaches. Using the example of 'nature', Elias illustratively explained the meaning of the term synthesis.

The term 'nature' is "on the other hand, therefore, the concept of nature became the highest symbol for the unity of the order, linking together all the possible subject matter of the natural sciences. In this sense it expressed a high level of detachment and reality-congruence".<sup>23</sup> That this stage has not been reached in the social sciences yet has to do with the fact that the concept of society is much more determined by the affective involvement than is the concept of nature. The latter remains one of the answers to the humans' need for emotion. Nonetheless, this mixture of reality congruency and fantasy, of detachment and involvement is, however, much more determined by fantasy and involvement than it is in the case of the concept of nature.

Elias's importance for sociology in the narrow sense and social sciences in the broad sense lies in the fact that, on the one hand, he points the way to more substantial and object-adequate terms and thus opens up possibilities to reach a better understanding of human societies on a higher level of synthesis. When he no longer speaks of monopoly capitalism, and the mechanisms attributed to it, but of the process of monopolizing, he reaches a higher level of synthesis, including earlier explanation but also expanding and reconditioning them.

23 Norbert Elias: On nature. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 14, *Essays I. On the sociology of knowledge and the sciences*, UCD 2009, pp. 66–84, p. 57.

Elias breaks with the traditional formation of sociological concepts, which at the same time is an expression of certain notions of the societies these people form together. The outstanding feature of these differences is that Elias does not distinguish conceptually between individual and society. He breaks with the long-held notion that there was ‘the society’ and ‘the autonomous individual’. Therefore, for his examinations of the “society of individuals”, there no longer a need for a difference between a structure-functional and an action-theoretical level. A text with the title “The Society of Individuals” had already been indicated in a supplement of the first issue of “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” for a Swedish magazine in 1939—but was not published. Elias had then worked on the text time and again in the 1940s and 1950s. A second text of this period was included in the book published in 1987.<sup>24</sup> Finally there is a third text from 1986. The topic of all three texts is one of sociology’s fundamental questions: in what sense and how is the organization level of society more than the sum of the individuals which together form this society.

Comparing these three texts, one can see how, over the production process of almost 50 years, the perspective of long-term development becomes more central. One could say, in other words, that his sociological process theory is coming more and more to the fore. By overcoming of classical conceptual opposites of action and structure, he reaches a higher level of synthesis. At the same time this means that the overcome levels of synthesis belong to a process of

24 Norbert Elias: The Society of Individuals. In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 10, UCD 2001.

knowledge development. This leads to occasional misunderstandings when it is attempted, in the sense of the actually overcome developmental stage of knowledge, to dissect out an action level or a structural level from the Eliasian works. Such attempts are a retrograde step and at the same time an evidence for the fact that the elaboration of a new position is not synonymous with their recognition.

In the essay “Über die Natur” (“On Nature”) he also takes up this question that has already troubled him at the beginning of the 1920s in his dissertation and in his contribution to the leaders’ newspaper of the Jewish hiking association “Blau-Weiß”. Is there any chance at all for human societies to survive if they are relying on a priori knowledge, which is quasi-generic for humans, if they are relying on what philosophers call transcendental truth? The answer is no. Humans have to learn from their mothers and fathers “reality congruent knowledge”<sup>25</sup> without which they cannot survive.

In the process of societal development, the development of knowledge is a relatively autonomous part. By proving the process character, by showing that the stages of the human consciousness (this, too, is a problem taken up early on) should more rightfully be examined as the development of the relation of human involvement and detachment to themselves, to other humans and to nature, the second of his book’s outstanding feature shows in contrast to traditional positions. The evidence of long-term transformations of the attitudes is only one aspect, only one line of the development of complex societies. It is only the intertwining of sociogenesis and psychogenesis, of civilizing, monopolizing

25 Norbert Elias: On nature, loc. cit., p. 66.



and state formation that allows for a more adequate integration of individual aspects into the general context of the development of human societies.

Thinking in process and in intertwinings belongs together. It is only in this combination that Elias can reach that degree of synthesis which enables him to answer the research questions he had asked in younger years. He not only finds confirmed his earlier doubts about the significance of mental constructs for the explanation of societal problems, but he also determines how and after which pattern the humans' thinking, acting and feeling changes in the context of the development of the societies they form together. Developing this new paradigm, which breaks with the traditions of sociology, needed the processes of transformation of his knowledge, his attitude and emotions. Just as the child has to repeat the transformations of internal and external constraints, the scientist Elias had to repeat the slow changes of involvement and detachment, which accompanied the long-term process of knowledge enhancement and the emergence of modern science. He had to learn a lot, had to acquire knowledge from neighbouring disciplines, had to reach a higher level of detachment, in order to finally substantiate the basic structure of the development of human societies in such a complex manner no one before him had been able to do.

This also answers many a question concerning the roots of his process theory. These are usually questions that in secret express the assertion or desire: he must have gotten this from someone; someone has to have influenced and shaped him. Most of the studies on conceptual history easily identify various traces of sociological approaches, psychologi-

cal research and historical depictions and some other disciplines. This is perfectly understandable since Elias adopted different partial insights for his theoretical insights that reached a higher synthesis level. That he made “the least possible concession ... to the necessity of expressing new things that have become visible through new words” (p. 8), sometimes misleads those who are oriented towards concepts and not problems to assume that there were strands of influence connected to older scholars whose works Elias incorporated into his work. As soon as one leaves individual strands of influence one recognizes that there have to be ten, twenty or even thirty names; this alone makes it obvious how insignificant this aspect has to be for the understanding of the complete works.

If one looks more precisely, one soon recognizes that such an approach cannot grasp the particular of the Eliasian achievement. What does help is concentrating on his reception of Freud and examining this. For what is the use of proving that Max Weber already showed that the emergence and development of modern states are identical with the attainment and assertion of the physical power monopoly? What is the use of showing that regarding Mannheim the thought can be found that changes are spreading from the top to the bottom? This does neither uncover the long-term process of civilizing nor the close connection between civilizing and monopolizing; it also does not provide proof for the economic process of monopoly formation as a special case of monopolizing in all human orders of intertwining.

This is the particular and the significant in Elias. Early on interested in research questions and problems of development of human societies, he collected everything contrib-

uting to his knowledge along the way (in Breslau, Freiburg, Heidelberg and Frankfurt) and uses all these different components of knowledge to compose an innovation whose significance is comparable to the innovations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century by Comte and Marx. It is an innovation which is without precedent at its time, even though all others with whom he studied and discussed had the same information and insight at their hands.

Like Marx, he could say: ‘Now as to me, there is no credit due to me for having discovered the objects of sociology, history and psychology. What I did for the first time was, firstly, providing evidence for the fact that the development of societies is a long-term, relatively unplanned but structure process, that, secondly, the individual parts of the process, like civilizing, monopolizing and state formation, are related to each other, and, thirdly, the humans who together form these societies are living in changing interrelationships.’ He could also add: ‘They who relate sociological concepts to people, i.e. searching the starting point not with the individual or in abstract systems but in the interrelations these people form, they who take into account and examine sociogenesis and psychogenesis in their intertwining, and they who observe the relative spontaneity of the changing interrelations of the people, they will find a way out of the dualisms and dichotomies of today’s sociology.’<sup>26</sup>

26 A comprehensive comparison between Elias and the sociology of the time can be found in: Johan Goudsblom: *Sociology in the Balance*. Columbia University Press 1977.

## Elias' Country Utopia

Elias has found his way. At the end of a long work life, he can say that he achieved what he, as a young man, planned to achieve and what, in his introduction to “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation”, he refer to as the attempt of “steering a course between the Scylla of this ‘staticism’, which tends to express all historical movement as something motionless and without evolution, and the Charybdis of the ‘historical relativism’ which sees in history only constant transformation, without penetrating to the order underlying this transformation and to the laws governing the formation of historical structures” (p. 6). Elias has left this narrowness behind.

A last point remains. With regard to the social sciences of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Oscar Wilde has once written that no map was useful if it did not contain the land Utopia. This means, all the sciences of humans are not worthwhile if they do not also include improving the lives of the people. In Elias, too, a reference can be found to an improved, for humans more appropriate life—albeit not in the sense of a political vision. This was far from him. For the people, his land Utopia is “a more durable balance, a better attunement, between the overall demands of people’s social existence on the one hand and their personal needs and inclinations on the other” (p. 490). This is what he—along with us—evokes by referring to “happiness” and “freedom” (ibid.).

# Ninth Chapter

## Hoping and Waiting

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‘There is no failure’, he said quietly,  
‘there is only progress ...  
We are always on our way to  
getting at what really is behind things.’  
Botho Strauß: The Young Man

**A**t the time when he departed for France, he had hardly imagined that a long, and at times bitter, period would be laying ahead of him. It took 21 years until he found a position as a university lecturer and then another ten years—1964 at the “Max-Weber-Congress of Sociology”—until he could step in front of a German academic audience again. Another thirteen years passed—in the meantime he had turned 80—before the city of Frankfurt awarded him the Adorno Prize in 1977 and gave him the recognition for which he had to wait so long. During the whole time, Elias has never given up. Not himself and not his confidence that

he would help the people to gain a better understanding of their social existence.

The years in exile alone would be worth a separate book. Not at all enough has been publicized on this. Hoping and waiting until the end of the war was all that most of the people could do. And even afterwards the time of doubt and fear was not over. They who had been fortunate enough to flee to the USA in the 1930s may have found themselves subjected to the orgies of persecution by the McCarthy committees. There are certainly individual manifestations and effects of the exile in each case; and accordingly it would be appropriate to compare the general fate with that of the isolated case of Elias.

Such an extensive project cannot be pursued in this book. It has a different aim. However, since “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” was written in exile, and its reception was also determined by the associated circumstances, I would like to portray some of its episodes in this last chapter. They are sidelights, illuminating the, in many things characteristic, images without any claim to a conclusive characteristic depiction. I proceed chronologically, following the time structure of the events, and will therefore commence with the time in Paris.

## **Exile I: Paris**

**E**lias has reported little about the time of his exile, in particular about the psychological stress. One has to read his poems to have a presentiment, without any claim to precise knowledge. Suddenly finding oneself in a foreign

world—how does one cope with that? Sure, Elias knew Paris; each year since 1930—as he reports in the ‘Frankfurter Lebenslauf’—he had spent his summer holidays there in order to collect material for his postdoctoral thesis “Der höfische Mensch”. But to be in exile—that was something completely different. The narrator in “The Ballade of Poor Jacob” describes the situation of the refugee in a large, foreign city thus:

“So at last he came to the great city of Paris.  
He walked around in the streets amazed  
at all the happy people  
sitting outside the cafes by the cook stoves  
and felt very alone  
for he couldn’t be happy at all  
and he was frozen and hungry.”<sup>1</sup>

But further on, the ballade also stated “He ... got to know a lot of people who were very kind to him”. Until then Elias had only had a few acquaintances in Paris. One of them was the sociologist Célestin Bouglé, whom he had met at the ‘Europäische Hochschulwochen’ (European University Weeks) in Davos in 1930. Since 1920, Bouglé headed a centre for social documentation at the highly respected École Normale and, in 1935, became the director of this elite university. He invited Elias for a private visit and provided him with a reference for a foundation in Amsterdam. The scholarship granted by them enabled him to survive and to continue his

1 Norbert Elias: Die Ballade vom Armen Jakob. In: *Los der Menschen. Gedichte/Nachdichtungen*. Frankfurt/Main 1987, pp. 89–98 (here: p. 94). (GS-Bd. 18, pp. 101–114).

scientific work. One of the results was the article he composed for the emigrants' journal *Der Ausweg* (The Way Out) on the expulsion of the Huguenots from France.

His own exile situation was not addressed in this context; but if one compares the fate of the Huguenots with that of the Jews, one can find many similarities.<sup>2</sup> Another result was the essay "Kitschstil und Kitschzeitalter" ("The kitsch style and the age of kitsch").<sup>3</sup> Elias received suggestions for this, inter alia, in an attempt to produce and sell toys. With his German friends, for instance, the workers' poet Turek<sup>4</sup> and the sculptor Herz, he tried to earn his livelihood and become financially self-sufficient. Maurice Herz has reported about this in a letter to me, dating from 8 November 1987: "I was indeed close friends with N.E. during the epoch you are interested in. He organized a company ... it was a small wooden toy factory. N.E. provided the capital and took care of the presentation and sales. The other friend was in charge of the equipment and the maintenance of the machines, and I drafted the models and implemented them. The company existed for about two years. I do not think that N.E. was able to recover the money he had invested in the company. But we scraped along based on this during that time".<sup>5</sup>

2 Norbert Elias: The expulsion of the Huguenots from France (1935). In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, Early Writings, UCD 2005, pp. 97–104.

3 Norbert Elias: The kitsch style and the age of kitsch (1935). In: Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 1, Early Writings, UCD 2005, pp. 85–96.

4 Ludwig Turek: Ein Prolet erzählt. Lebensschilderungen eines deutschen Arbeiters. Köln 1972 (authorized reprint of the editions published in the Malik-Verlag in 1930).

5 This letter, together with the other material mentioned in this book, is deposited in the German Literature Archive in Marbach.



It is likely that Elias did witness the shutdown of the company, if it had actually survived for two years. After a year in Paris it had dawned on him that he did not have any academic career prospects there. In Switzerland—he had noticed this during a roundtrip with Margarete Freudenthal, on which she had taken him in her car before his departure for France—the situation was likewise unpromising. Moreover, he could not go to the USA, where most of his Heidelberg and Frankfurt friends were, because he lacked the necessary connection to obtain a visa. So he used the chance offered by friends to come to England. I have talked about this at the beginning of the eighth chapter.

Before he left the continent, he made one more journey to the German Reich and travelled to Breslau. This was no innocuous matter. Others, like Karl-August Wittfogel, paid for such courage or imprudence with a stay in the concentration camp. But Elias did not want to go to England without having once more visited with his beloved parents. He was now certain that he had to stay abroad for a longer period of time. As a farewell gift, his parents gave him a small portable typewriter. He then drove to Ostend and embarked on his journey to England.

## **Exile II: London**

He was kindly welcomed in England, he was safe. But again there were problems regarding the university career. Initially, his linguistic skills were scant and the British higher education system was not easily accessible. Besides, there were only few positions for sociologists anyway.

Elias was thus happy to receive a small stipend from a refugee agency, which allowed him to continue his studies in German. He sat in the reading room of the British Museum and wrote, as stated previously, his great book.

Once he was able to anticipate the completion of his study, he organized the pre-print, which I have talked about at the beginning of the first chapter. But he not only organized the print but also a marketing campaign by sending copies to friends, acquaintances and people of whom he thought they could be interested in his work and then act as multipliers. In the case of Borkenau and Foulkes there was positive feedback. However, his efforts were not always successful, as the correspondence with Walter Benjamin shows.<sup>6</sup>

## **A Correspondence with Walter Benjamin**

Following the suggestions of his friend Gisèle Freund, Elias had written to Benjamin on 17 April 1938. Even though he belonged to the circle of the Institute for Social Research in Frankfurt, he seemingly had no personal contact with Benjamin since in the letter he refers to Gisèle Freund. He thus sent him the first volume with the desire “to see the book reviewed by you in the journal of the Institute”. He hoped that Benjamin would be interested in learning how Elias assessed the connection between the process of society and the “psychological” in the process. He has

6 At the time of the first publication of this book, the original material from the correspondence was located in the literature archive of the Academy of Arts of the GDR (the two Elias letters in folder 30 (sheet no. 25/147), the Benjamin’s responses in folder 36 (sheet 116/119)).

tried, “to make accessible to our understanding the order of the historical transformation (and) ... to examine step by step what are the processes were the motors o these psychological changes”.

Benjamin’s reply dating from 13 May 1938 was very hesitant. Since Elias was apparently reserved towards the dialectic materialism, he must be leaning towards the idealistic conception of history. He wanted to wait for the second volume and only held out the prospect of reporting in advance on the “cultural historic content”, while he did not forget to add the pointed remark that “there are far better experts of the cultural history of the 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> century than me”.

Now it was Elias’s turn to act aloof. Having returned from a lecture tour through Scandinavia to London, he replied on 3 June 1938. It was in particular the reference to the idealistic conception of history and the cultural history that have apparently—and rightly—annoyed him. He could not understand at all, he wrote, how someone knowing the first volume could “see in him an example of an ‘idealistic’ concept of history”. He had found “a clear method and unambiguous material which would overcome the still predominant static approach to psychological phenomena”. Then he continues: “Whatever one may understand as ‘dialectic’, this word aims at reflecting the order, the structure and the regularity of social change. To show that the construction of the psychological was underlying the same order is the objective of the first volume”. Furthermore, this was by no means cultural history, and cultural historians were therefore hardly in the position to adequately discuss labour.

The subsequent letter from Paris dating form 12 June 1938, which ended the short correspondence, had already been

published in 1967, albeit without reference to Elias, probably to evidence that Benjamin had still walked the paths of Marxist virtue in 1938.<sup>7</sup> Benjamin now gave Elias short shrift: “I should like nothing more than being able to follow your train of thought. But what one is supposed to understand as social psychology is decided, in my opinion, only in the layout of a social theory that has as its primary subject the class antagonisms, that is the prevailing exploitation of a majority’s labour by minority in the respective societies”. In the conclusion of the short letter, it then says: “it is not impossible that my view seems restricted to you; but what I achieve, even if that is a review, has precisely this as a prerequisite”. Benjamin’s reaction is an example for the way how in the future the book would always be met with rejection when it encountered orthodox positions—be they of theoretical and/or methodological nature.

This shows that the reaction was not always positive and friendly. Unfortunately there is no further proof of similar reactions to Elias’s efforts of the time. It is certain that he had written a significantly larger number of such ‘advertising letters’, but, besides Sigmund Freud who had thanked Elias and had confirmed the receipt of the book on a post card, there are so far no other known addressees. In 1939 Elias started a similar campaign; of this it is only known that one copy was sent to Thomas Mann in Holland—as stated in the beginning of this book.

7 Walter Benjamin: Brief an einen unbekanntem Adressaten. In: *Alternative X* (1967), Heft 56/57, p. 203.

## **Morris Ginsberg, Karl Mannheim and the London School of Economics**

**T**he outbreak of the Second World War made obsolete all other efforts and the dissemination of the book. On the continent remained only a few islands that were not drawn into the murderous inferno. England, too, was not spared. The German air force threatened and bombarded London and other English cities. The London School of Economics (LSE), just as many parts of the University of London, was relocated from the most endangered capital to the province. Teaching staff and students of the LSE were brought to Cambridge; amongst them was Elias, who had in the meantime held an appointment as senior research assistant.

After a long time of accustoming himself to the English environment, he had increasingly come into contact with English social scientists, in particular from the LSE. He was certainly helped in this by his acquaintance with Mannheim. Elias dedicated the 1937 pre-print him and his wife Julischka. Also he found accommodation with the economic historian Beales, who, with his wife, had opened his house above all to younger colleagues. Elias also met Harold J. Lasky, who then held the chair in political sciences at the LSE and who was a board member of the Labour Party from 1936 to 1949. And he came in contact with Morris Ginsberg, who held the chair for sociology. He was an influential man since for a long time he has been the only professor of sociology in England, where sociology was by no means as institutionalized as it was on the continent. Wolf Lepenies has pointed out that it was paradoxically the “early willingness of English statisticians, administrative officers and politicians to

use sociological knowledge to solve social problems” that was accountable, because “[t]he entry of sociology into the administration let the organizational safeguarding appear much more urgent than it did on the continent”.<sup>8</sup>

Most of Elias’s colleagues would not have been able to read “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” due to the lack of language skills. But besides some few exceptions there were also German-speaking expatriates who could relate the book to their English friends. After all, the size of the book alone made obvious that it had to be a somehow important book and at least represented a great intellectual achievement by the author. The historian Francis L. Carsten, who met Elias in Paris in autumn 1935 and who stayed in friendly contact with him in London, has told me that a contract for the English translation had already been set up with a publisher, managed by the later Labour foreign minister, Patrick Gordon Walker, before the start of the war. A historian named Walter Simon was assigned to be the translator. However, this plan came to nothing. In any case, it was no wonder that new contacts developed after the evacuation to Cambridge, for instance to C.P. Snow, the renowned novelist, scientist and politician, who was then a fellow at the Christ College.

Seemingly, the contact to Ginsberg was intensive and Elias’s reputation as sociologist was quite good. When Ginsberg in Cambridge looked for an assistant, it was widely believed that his final choice would be Elias, and many, Beales,

8 Wolf Lepenies: *Über den Krieg der Wissenschaften und der Literatur. Der Status der Soziologie seit der Aufklärung*. In: *Merkur* XXXX (1986), pp. 482–494 (here: pp. 490 f.).

for instance, advised Ginsberg to do so. That this came to nothing was, ironically, to blame on the same person who, eleven years before, had opened Elias the door to an academic career—Karl Mannheim.

Elias has remarked on this, in connection with the Zurich lecture by Mannheim on “Die Bedeutung der Konkurrenz im Gebiet des Geistigen”, in the “Notizen zum Lebenslauf (Notes of a lifetime)” and stated that competition was apparently part of Mannheim’s lifestyle. In any case, Mannheim, soon after he had arrived in England, became mixed up in a tough and relentless competitive struggle with Ginsberg, even though the same invited him to the LSE and helped him to find a lecturing post. Mannheim also thought himself the better sociologist and “didn’t hesitate to say so. His lectures were lively and interesting. The students flocked to him”. Eventually Ginsberg issued an ultimatum and “his college, the LSE, as was inevitable, stood by its own man and let the newcomer go”.<sup>9</sup>

Elias had reported that Ginsberg was “mortally wounded” and, a few years later in Cambridge, “still with bitterness in his heart, told me about this painful trial in strength”.<sup>10</sup> What he had not talked about, and related to me upon questions pertaining to his time in Cambridge (on 1 December 1987), were the reason and the result of this conversation, which had a bitter consequence for Elias also. On this occasion, Ginsberg explained to him that he would not be able to employ him as assistant, despite all the assumptions and good advice by the colleagues. As a former assistant of

9 Norbert Elias: Notes on a lifetime, p. 33.

10 Ibid.

Mannheim's, Elias would, so the reasoning, always remind him of Mannheim and the painful experiences with him. He could not bring himself to this. During the conversation, Ginsberg advised him to go to the US, because who in England would like to know anything about sociology, perhaps even about Max Weber and German sociology. Only, Elias did not know anybody in the US who could provide him with an entry visa.

## **University in the Internment Camp**

**G**insberg remained a good friend; this is shown, for instance, by the fact that he sent money to Elias in the internment camp. Because not only Ginsberg's reservations but also a suddenly executed internment of all Germans, Austrians and Italians, even those who unambiguously were refugees, ended the dream of a university career in Germany. When the German troupes approached the French channel coast the English commenced with the internment of the mentioned groups of persons. Initially, Elias was brought to the 'Alien Internment Camp' at Huyton near Liverpool. All passports were collected, just as the carried-along money. The interned were dependent on the gifts and donations from the outside. Ginsberg sent money to Elias, who was after a while relocated to the Isle of Man because he was unfit for military service for reasons of age. Many others were brought to Canada or shipped to Australia, where, for instance, Borkenau was brought for some time.

Several contemporary witnesses exist for Elias's time in the internment camp and his activities there. Eric Wolf has



talked about it in “Human Figurations”.<sup>11</sup> I have received oral reports, confirming and expanding Wolf’s statement, from Peter Galliner, who was the director of the International Press Institute of London in the 1980s, from Professor Georg Schwarzenberger and his wife Suse. After Schwarzenberger’s retirement from the Law School of the University of London, the couple lived in Harpenden/Hertfordshire. We (and Elias) had already met the Schwarzenbergers in Heidelberg in 1928. George Schwarzenberger and Elias now met again in the internment camp on the Isle of Man twelve years after their Heidelberg days. In his memories in “Human Figurations”, Wolf had—as Gallinier did orally later on—reported that Elias had participated in a self-organized camp university. This was one of the activities which were organized, first of all, by ‘politically’ knowledgeable camp inmates in order to make better use of their time of internment but also to prevent loneliness and desperation. Above all he was able to remember two topics of such lectures since they influenced his later scientific development: “One on ‘The Network of Social Relationships’, the other on ‘Monopolies of Power’”.<sup>12</sup>

After the relocation to the Isle of Man, Elias continued his occupation at the camp university, but no longer as a ‘simply’ lecturer but now, as Schwarzenberger remembers precisely, as ‘president’. He, Schwarzenberger, was put in charge of the building of a ‘law faculty’ and had functioned as its ‘dean’, but the head of the whole operations was Elias. The latter or-

11 Eric R. Wolf: Encounter with Norbert Elias. In: Human Figurations, loc. cit., p. 28–35.

12 Loc. cit., p. 29 f.

ganized everything, was harmonizing, and, what was especially important in this situation, was very humanly. In the internment camp of the Isle of Man the already-mentioned 'Ballade of Poor Jacob' was performed. Elias wrote the lyrics and the musicologist Hans Gál<sup>13</sup> composed the music.<sup>14</sup>

Elias was allowed to leave the internment camp after about eight months. From Cambridge, C.P. Snow had been helpful and, together with its warden Canon Raven, had organized a celebration at the Christ College on the occasion of Elias's return. But with this, Snow's possibilities of assistance were exhausted for now. Snow, who paid attention to career and publicity, had seen a soon-to-be prominence in Elias. However, when this becoming famous dragged on interest and contact decreased.

At the time of his return in spring 1947, Elias's future was looking bleak. A position at university seemed unobtainable. The great book seemed to have fallen into oblivion. As I mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, Elias did not give up. Surely, this must have been very, very hard for him. In the poem, a prefix to the lyric volume "Los der Menschen" ('The Human Lot'), one can sense some of the depression and hopelessness, this darkness of the exile about which Elias hardly ever talked. It says at the beginning: "Manchmal an Regentagen / ist es schwer / die Hand zu heben / man vermag nicht mehr / den Fuß zu rühren / um zu gehen / Stirn

- 13 The 1890-born Austrian composer and musicologist Hans Gál had fled after the 'Anschluss' of his home country to the Greater German Reich. From 1945 on, he taught in Edinburgh, where he died on 3 October 1987.
- 14 On the premiere and the restaging of the ballade see Hermann Korte: Armer Jakob, armer Norbert, armer Hans. In: Biographische Skizzen zu Norbert Elias. Wiesbaden 2013, pp. 85–100.

und Mund sind leer / man hört die Zeit an sich vorüber-  
wehen” (Sometimes on rainy days / it is difficult / to lift the  
hand / one is no longer able / to move the foot / to walk /  
head and mouth are empty / one hears the time brushing  
past).<sup>15</sup> Ulrich Gembarde did not choose the last two lines  
without a reason for the title of his television film.

## **In the Front Court of the University**

**A**fter the time in the internment camp, Elias had no other option than accepting a position below the university level. Beales brought him into contact with the Workers’ Education Association of the Labour Party. From there he changed to the Department for Adult Education at the London University where he remained until he took on a university lecturer position in Leicester in 1954. He had a heavy workload and was compelled to accept any subject: from sociology to psychology to national economy and economic history. He did reasonably well financially; his pedagogic commitment and skill helped him with this. Regarding the payment, it dependent on the type of class one held. If it was only a one-year-course, there was little money to be earned. If a lecturer managed to have three-year-courses over the entire period, he was paid enough to make a living of it. This was only possible for good teachers who furthermore invested much time into working with people.

15 Norbert Elias: Los der Menschen. In: Gedichte/Nachdichtungen. Frankfurt/Main 1987, p. 9.

In the conversation of 1 December 1987, Elias had described to me the time in the adult education as a good time during which he nevertheless never gave up the desire to teach at a university. Thus he had taken on every offer regarding guest lectures at universities. In particular Professor (and later Lady) Wootton had helped, supported and repeatedly invited him to guest lectures at Bedford College of the London University. He had contacts to the University Hull also and, for some time, travelled there for one day a week. With this he got some routine as an ‘English lecturer’ and slowly ‘stalked up on’ the university. In 1954 the big day had arrived. He was not appointed a chair in sociology, the actual professorship of which, other than in Germany, most of the time there was only one in England. But he came a lecturer, was able to teach and do research and called many of today’s English professors of sociology his pupils, though without this resulting in any impulse for the reception of his German studies in English sociology.<sup>16</sup>

Eventually, he became professor—namely in 1962, when he took over the chair for sociology at the University of Ghana in Accra for a few years.<sup>17</sup> Ghana, then governed by Kwame Nkrumah, was still a member of the Commonwealth and mainly recruited its university teachers in England. During this time Elias collected African art. In 1970 he exhibited part of his collection of African masks and sculp-

16 On the appointment in Leicester and further promotions, see Hermann Korte: Norbert Elias an der Universität Leicester. In: *Biographische Skizzen zu Norbert Elias*, loc. cit., p. 31–44.

17 For the details of his stay in Ghana, see Hermann Korte: *Der ethnologische Blick bei Norbert Elias*. In: *Biographische Skizzen zu Norbert Elias*, loc. cit., p. 45–66.

tures in an exhibition in the City of Leicester Museum and Art Gallery.<sup>18</sup>

## Once More from Heidelberg to Frankfurt

At the end of April 1964 Elias, having returned from Africa, participated in the 15<sup>th</sup> German Congress of Sociology in Heidelberg. It was dedicated to the topic “Max Weber and Sociology Today”. Though he was not invited to speak at one of the main events where most of the then A-list of German sociology talked, he was, however, given the opportunity to give his announced talk on “Gruppencharisma und Gruppenschande” (‘Group charisma and group disgrace’) in the context of an event by the specialist committee for ethno-sociology with the topic “Paria and externes Proletariat” (‘Pariah and the External Proletariat’).

This talk contained a critique, already expressed in the title, of Weber’s ideal type of the charismatic leader. Not only the individual but also groups could develop charismatic leader characteristics; in doing so, they are interwoven with less privileged groups, as Elias’s thesis said. He had developed this model of a figuration of “The Established and the Outsiders” in the context of a joint study with Scotson which was published as book in the following year (1965). He had not brought a fully prepared manuscript to Heidelberg so that the report about his lecture in the conference—the ‘Ver-

18 Cf. the exhibition catalogue. Leicester Museum and Art Gallery, 24 April–14 June 1970; and Norbert Elias: African Art. In: *Collected Works of Norbert Elias*, Vol. 16, Essays III. On Sociology and the Humanities, UCD 2009, pp. 201–208.

handlungen des 15. Deutschen Soziologentages’—was rather short and misleading compared to the other talks given at this events.<sup>19</sup>

Likewise short but more accurate was the corresponding passage in the conference proceedings published in the ‘Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie’ in Köln. The report initially referred to the fact that the talk given by Elias “had nothing to do”<sup>20</sup> with the frame topic of the session by the specialist committee for ethno-sociology ‘Paria und externes Proletariat’. This confirmed the suspicion that Elias had been shunted there. About the lecture the report said: “The most interesting lecture was that given by Norbert Elias, who talked about a community investigation in England, in which the development of group charisma had been closely monitored. Even though, at the time of the examination, there were little educational or behavioural differences between the two groups the less respected group accepted the superiority of the other group. This was because the privileged group had previously exercised actual superiority over the underprivileged group. With this report, Elias showed that the phenomenon of group charisma cannot be researched or dealt with in isolation, that is without the connection to the underprivileged group and vice versa.”<sup>21</sup>

But the report also talked about a particular incident, but in a manner that does not cast a good light on the reporter,

19 Otto Stammer (Hrsg.): Max Weber und die Soziologie heute. Verhandlungen des 15. Deutschen Soziologentages. Tübingen 1965, pp. 331 f.

20 Tagungsberichte vom 15. Deutschen Soziologentag in Heidelberg. In: KZfSS XVI (1964), pp. 404–424 (here: p. 422).

21 Ibid., p. 423.

who seems to have been identical with the then director of this event, the Heidelberg assistant Ernst W. Müller. A “leading incident” during the event is talked about: “After the lecture by Elias, even before the moderators could open the discussion, Dieter Claessens (Münster), whom neither the moderator nor many of the participants knew, spoke from the floor a few words of praise about Elias, who is well-established among experts”.<sup>22</sup> Most of the facts stated here are wrong. Maybe it was actually true that the moderator and some of the participants did not know Dieter Claessens. He had only been appointed to a chair in Münster, besides Frankfurt and Köln one of the heartlands of sociology, three years prior—but to not know him at all? The reporter’s assertion that Elias was “well” established amongst experts is misleading. Hardly anyone knew him. I, for one, have read in the archive of the University of Frankfurt the correspondence which the Faculty of Economic and Social Sciences had exchanged with the president and legal advisor of the University of Frankfurt from 1956 to 1962 on the question, what kind of career Elias would have made had he not been forced to go into exile shortly before the conclusion of his postdoctoral qualification. These in many ways interesting files are clear proof of one thing. Even at the Frankfurt faculty, where he had been an irregular assistant from 1930 to 1933, nobody had even a vague idea who Elias had become in the meantime. Everywhere it was like this, apart from the few sociologists who had happened to discover upon Elias. And what was most wrong about the report was that Claessens had spoken after Elias.

22 Ibid.

Claessens, as he related to me in a letter of 22 January 1987, had gone to the event 'Paria und externes Proletariat' to hear Elias. About the course of the event, he said, amongst other things, "as always the first lectures went on too long, and soon one saw that the schedule, in which Elias and then Müller were planned to speak, could not be adhered to. Müller got onto the podium and succinctly explained that, due to the advanced time, Elias would have to be foregone. Instead, he would speak now. I was so appalled by this that I went to the front, asked to take the floor and told the circa 50 attendees who was amongst them. And then Elias spoke". For the fact that he spoke before Elias, Claessens can name further witnesses.

It is probably symptomatic that Elias's first academic appearance in Germany after 30 years went like this. Few knew him; he had only a few friends. Claessens became one of them and, in the following year, invited him to Münster, the first station of his slowly becoming known to the public in German sociology. Guest professorships in Aachen and Konstanz, the re-issue of "Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation" and the publishing of the books "Die höfische Gesellschaft" and "Was ist Soziologie?" were further milestones on the long way into the institution sociology.<sup>23</sup>

When, in 1977, he was rewarded with the Adorno Prize by the city of Frankfurt, he was still "an outsider full of impartial insight",<sup>24</sup> as whom Wolf Lepenies praised him in his laudation, but he was no longer unknown. The path that had

23 For the time in Münster, see: Hermann Korte: Dieter Claessens, Norbert Elias und ich. In: Biographische Skizzen zu Norbert Elias, loc. cit., p. 45–54.

24 Wolf Lepenies: Ein Außenseiter voll unbefangener Einsicht, a.a.O.



led him once again from Heidelberg to Frankfurt had been a tough and arduous one, but now, more than sixty years of unwavering and patient endeavours, his “modest” contribution to the advancement of societal models, which “contribute better to alleviating the increasing disorientation and uncertainty in our social cosmos—where are we heading?—and help us to go beyond the old, traditional models of social development” met with a response.<sup>25</sup> A long life does have its advantages, certainly a successful.

At the end of his acceptance speech, Elias used an image that forged a bridge between his early occupation with the problems of human societies and the Adorno Prize. It is the previously cited image of the torch that was handed over. It had already been used as the motto to the essay of 1921 and was characteristic of Elias’s work life. One could hardly imagine a better allegory for the biography of a human scientist, a better symbol for the biography of a classic: “Work in the human sciences, as in other sciences, is a torch race: we take over the torch from the preceding generations, carry it a distance further and hand it over to the following generation, so that it can go beyond us. The work of the preceding generations is not abolished by this; it is the precondition of the ability of later generations to go beyond it. [...] I should like my example to give coming generations the courage to combine awareness of the continuity of their own lives with the strength and boldness that are needed for innovation. For the discipline of thinking for themselves, for going beyond the older generations.”<sup>26</sup>

25 Norbert Elias: Address on Adorno, loc. cit., p. 91.

26 Loc. cit., pp. 91 f.

# Conclusion: A Thanks to Many People

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**N**ow when I review in my thoughts the one and a half years during the mid-1980s I worked on the text, a couple of people spring to my mind who have supported me, helped me and whom I thanked then and who I do not want to forget. I cannot name them all, but I would like to particularly highlight some of them.

First and foremost I have to thank Norbert Elias for enduring my project that discussed a part of his life. I would not have been able to demand of him to condone it. But he has accompanied it with a cautious distance and was also willing to talk with me about individual episodes. It was no easy time for the two of us. We both had to contribute to a completion of the book that did not encumber our friendship.

Many people who have met Elias in the course of their life have helped me with information. I can only thank them by naming them in alphabetical order: Francis L. Carsten (London), Dieter Claessens (Berlin), Peter von Haselberg (Frankfurt), Maurice Herz (Paris), Karl Pfauter (Frankfurt),

Georg and Suse Schwarzenberger (Harpenden/Hertfordshire), Peter Seglow (London), Walter Slowak (Mannheim), Hans Speier (New York), Heinrich Taut (Lehnitz) and Alfred Wandrey (Osnabrück).

Furthermore, I have to thank the archivists whom I have met during my research. In those days the world of archives was relatively new to me. I was pleasantly surprised by the friendly helpfulness and the accommodating interest, which for me was in this extent unknown in the daily university life. Beside the university archives in Breslau, Heidelberg, Frankfurt/Main and Freiburg, I have to mention the archive of the Deutsche Jugendbewegung in the Burg Ludwigstein, the Germania Judaica (Köln), the Leo Baeck Institute (Jerusalem) and the Preußische Staatsbibliothek (Berlin).

I also wish to thank my friends and colleagues, who have taken an interest in many different ways. I must highlight Johan and Maria Goudsblom (Amsterdam), who gave me the courage not to give up. I have met both at the end of the 1960s. Because Norbert Elias had lived in Amsterdam since the mid-1970s—from 1978 in their house in the Viottastraat 13—the contact with them was especially close. Unfortunately, Maria Goudsbloom died in 2009. With Joop—as his friends are allowed to call him—I have been collegially working for more than 40 years, and have been also amicably cooperating for a long time now, and I am hoping to continue the time together for many more years.

# Bibliography

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## 1 Norbert Elias. Collected Works

All books and essays published in Elias's lifetime—be they German or English in original—and numerous interviews as well as his lyrical work have been published by Suhrkamp in 19 volumes of the *Gesammelte Schriften* (GS). On behalf of the Norbert Elias Stichting in Amsterdam, the sole heir to Elias, the GS were redacted by Reinhard Blomert, Heike Hammer, Johan Heilbron, Annette Treibel (chair) and Nico Wilterdink. At the start, Peter-Ulrich Merz-Benz was also a member of the editorial group.

Each volume has an index. The indices of the individual volumes have been conflated into a collective index.

## The Volumes of the Gesammelten Schriften:

1. Frühschriften
2. Die höfische Gesellschaft
3. Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation. Soziogenetische und psychogenetische Untersuchungen. Zwei Bände
  - 3.1. Wandlungen des Verhaltens in den weltlichen Oberschichten des Abendlandes
  - 3.2. Wandlungen der Gesellschaft. Entwurf zu einer Theorie der Zivilisation
4. Etablierte und Außenseiter (Mit John L. Scotson).
5. Was ist Soziologie?
6. Über die Einsamkeit der Sterbenden in unseren Tagen/  
Conditio Humana
7. Sport und Freizeit im Zivilisationsprozeß (mit Eric Dunning)
8. Engagement und Distanzierung
9. Über die Zeit
10. Die Gesellschaft der Individuen
11. Studien über die Deutschen
12. Mozart
13. Die Symboltheorie
14. Aufsätze (chronologisch ab 1949)
15. Aufsätze (chronologisch 1980)
16. Aufsätze (chronologisch ab 1985–1990)
17. Autobiographisches und Interviews
18. Gedichte und Sprüche
19. Gesamtregister

The volumes of The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, University College Dublin Press (CW):

- Vol. 1: Early Writings
- Vol. 2: The Court Society
- Vol. 3: On the Process of Civilisation: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations
- Vol. 4: The Established and the Outsiders
- Vol. 5: What is Sociology?
- Vol. 6: The Loneliness of the Dying and Humana Conditio
- Vol. 7: Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process
- Vol. 8: Involvement and Detachment
- Vol. 9: An Essay on Time
- Vol. 10: The Society of Individuals
- Vol. 11: Studies on the Germans: Power Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries
- Vol. 12: Mozart and Other Essays on Courtly Art
- Vol. 13: The Symbol Theory
- Vol. 14: Essays I: On the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sciences
- Vol. 15: Essays II: On Civilising Processes, State Formation and National Identity
- Vol. 16: Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities
- Vol. 17: Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections
- Vol. 18: Supplements and Index to the Collected Works  
The Genesis of the Naval Profession

After the death of Elias on 1 August 1990 two more then unpublished works were made public:

1998 in the *edition münchen* of the Bibliothek der Provinz the essay “Watteaus Pilgerfahrt zur Insel der Liebe” (Watteau’s pilgrimage to the island of love).

And 2007, edited by René Mölker and Stephen Mennell “The Genesis of the Naval Profession” (Dublin University Press).

Some unpublished texts are included in Norbert Elias: au-delà Freud. Sociologie, psychologie, psychanalyse. Dirigée par Bernhard Lahire. Paris 2010.

## 2 Select Secondary Literature

At the time of the first edition of this book (1988) the secondary literature on the work and biography of Norbert Elias was already extensive but manageable. 29 years later this is no longer the case. Most of the monographs have been translated; “Über den Prozeß der Zivilisation” can be found in more than 40 languages. Thus the secondary literature is not only found in the narrow Western European space but all over the world.

This is illustrated by the origins and the topics of the winners of the Norbert Elias Prize, which has been biannually awarded for “a first major book” by the Norbert Elias Stiftung since 1999:

1999 David Lepoutre (France): Couer de banlieue: Codes, rites et langages, (Paris: Odile Jacob 1997).

- 2001 Wilbert van Vree (Netherlands): Meetings, Manners and Civilisation, (London: University Leicester Press 1999).
- 2003 Nikola Tietze (Deutschland): Islamische Identitäten: Formen muslimischer Religiosität junger Männer in Deutschland und Frankreich (Hamburger Edition 2001).
- 2005 Jason Hughes (England): Learning to smoke. Tobacco Use in the West, (Chicago University Press 2003).
- 2007 Georgi Derlugian (Georgia): Bourdieu's Secret Admirer in the Caucasus: A World-System Biography (Chicago University Press 2005).
- 2009 Elizabeth Bernstein (USA): Temporarily Yours. Intimacy, Authenticity and the Commerce of Sex (Chicago Press 2007).
- 2011 Brett Bowden (Australia): The Empire of Civilization: The Evolution of an Imperial Idea (Chicago Press 2009).

For the reception and the continuation of Elias's work in Germany, I firstly refer to the books, which have been published since the late 1970s in the Suhrkamp Verlag:

- Blomert, Reinhard/Kuzmics, Helmut/Treibel, Annette (eds.): Transformationen des Wir-Gefühl. Studien zum nationalen Habitus. Frankfurt 1993.
- Gleichmann, Peter/Goudsblom, Johan/Korte, Hermann (eds.): Materialien zu Norbert Elias' Zivilisationstheorie. Frankfurt/M. 1979.
- Gleichmann, Peter/Goudsblom, Johan/Korte, Hermann (eds.): Macht und Zivilisation. Materialien zu Norbert Elias' Zivilisationstheorie 2, Frankfurt/M. 1984.



- Goudsblom, Johan: Soziologie auf der Waagschale. Frankfurt/M. 1979.
- Goudsblom Johan: Feuer und Zivilisation. Frankfurt/M. 1995.
- Klein, Gabriele/Liebsch, Katharina (eds.): Zivilisierung des weiblichen Ich. Frankfurt/M. 1997.
- Korte, Hermann (ed.): Gesellschaftliche Prozesse und individuelle Praxis. Bochumer Vorlesungen zu Norbert Elias' Zivilisationstheorie. Frankfurt/M. 1990).
- Korte, Hermann: Über Norbert Elias. Das Werden eines Menschenwissenschaftlers. Wiesbaden 2013.
- Krumey, Horst-Volker: Entwicklungsstrukturen von Verhaltensstandards. Eine soziologische Prozeßanalyse auf der Grundlage deutscher Anstands- und Manierenbücher von 1870–1970. Frankfurt/M. 1984.
- Oosterdiekhoff, Georg: Zivilisation und Strukturgenese. Norbert Elias und Piaget im Vergleich. Frankfurt/M. 2000.
- Rehberg, Karl-Siegbert (ed.): Norbert Elias und die Menschenwissenschaften. Studien zur Entstehung und Wirkungsgeschichte seines Werkes. Frankfurt/M. 1996.
- Schröter, Michael: "Wo zwei zusammenkommen in rechter Ehe". Sozio- und psychogenetische Studien über Eheschließungsvorgänge vom 12. bis 15. Jahrhundert. Mit einem Vorwort von Norbert Elias. Frankfurt/M. 1985.
- Schröter, Michael: Erfahrungen mit Norbert Elias. Frankfurt/M. 1997.
- Van Stolk, Bram/Wouters, Cas: Frauen im Zwiespalt. Beziehungsprobleme im Wohlfahrtsstaat. Frankfurt/M. 1987.

Waldhoff, Hans Peter: *Fremde und Zivilisierung. Wissenssoziologische Studien über das Verarbeiten von Gefühlen der Fremdheit. Probleme der modernen Peripherie-Zentrums-Migration am türkisch-deutschen Beispiel.* Frankfurt/M. 1995.

Towards the end of the 20th century the heavyweight of the publication in Germany shifted to Leske und Budrich in Opladen, which was initially merged with the Westdeutscher Verlag, while the latter soon became part of the Verlag Sozialwissenschaften (Springer VS). These publishers released a series of important books on the reception and continuation of Norbert Elias's works, amongst them the important introduction:

Treibel, Annette: *Die Soziologie von Norbert Elias. Eine Einführung in ihre Geschichte, Systematik und Perspektiven.* Wiesbaden 2008.

Annette Treibel has also established the series *Figurationen. Schriften zur Zivilisations- und Prozeßtheorie* which she edits in cooperation with Reinhard Blomert and Helmut Kuzmics. The following were published successively:

Blomert, Reinhard/Kuzmics, Helmut/Treibel, Annette (eds.): *Zivilisationstheorie in der Bilanz. Beiträge zum 100. Geburtstag von Norbert Elias.* Opladen 2000.

Anders, Kenneth: *Die unvermeidliche Universalgeschichte. Studien über Norbert Elias und das Teleologieproblem.* Opladen 2000.

- Hinz, Michael: Der Zivilisationsprozeß. Mythos oder Realität? Wissenschaftssoziologische Untersuchungen zur Elias-Duerr-Kontroverse. Opladen 2002.
- Reicher, Dieter: Schaffot und Schuldgefühl. Was Staatsaufbau und Todesstrafe miteinander zu tun haben. Opladen 2003.
- Kunze, Jan-Peter: Das Geschlechterverhältnis als Machtprozeß. Die Machtbalance der Geschlechter in Westdeutschland seit 1945. Wiesbaden 2005.
- Gleichmann, Peter R.: Soziologie als Synthese. Zivilisationstheoretische Schriften über Architektur, Wissen und Gewalt. Wiesbaden 2006.
- Barzantny, Anke: Mentoring-Programme für Frauen. Maßnahmen zu Strukturveränderungen in der Wissenschaft?, Wiesbaden 2008.
- Dörfelt, Tabea: Dichtung als Menschenwissenschaft. Das poetische Werk von Norbert Elias. Wiesbaden 2013.
- Frerichs, Melanie: Innovationsprozesse und organisationaler Wandel in der Automobilindustrie. Eine prozesssoziologische Analyse betrieblicher Machtproben. Wiesbaden 2014.
- Górnicka, Barbara: Nakedness, Shame, and Embarrassment. A Long-Term Sociological Perspective. Wiesbaden 2016.

Two other publications with the Westdeutscher Verlag are worth mentioning:

Ernst, Stefanie: *Machtbeziehungen zwischen den Geschlechtern. Wandlungen der Ehe im 'Prozeß der Zivilisation'*. Wiesbaden 1996.

Ernst, Stefanie: *Geschlechterverhältnis und Führungspositionen. Eine figurationssoziologische Analyse der Stereotypenkonstruktion*. Wiesbaden 1999.

Before the most current publications will be presented in a kind of a snapshot, I must discuss the important work of Stephen Mennell, whose books—unlike some by Johan Goussblom, the most important author on Norbert Elias—have not been translated into German. A selection:

Stephen Mennell: *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Age to the Present*. Oxford 1985.

Stephen Mennell: *Norbert Elias: An Introduction*. Dublin 1992/1998.

Stephen Mennell: *The American Civilizing Process*. Cambridge 2007.

Stephen Mennell and Norman Gabriel (eds.): *Norbert Elias and Figural Research: Processual Thinking in Sociology*. Oxford 2011.

Besides the books mentioned, in the last 15 years, since the printing of the second edition of this book, hundreds of books have been published world-wide, to say nothing of the innumerable number of essays. Thus only a **selection**

can be presented here—this brings up the question of the selection criteria. To avoid this dilemma, I have decided to list as a snapshot illustrating the variety of topics all titles announced or reviewed in Issue 38 of *Figurations*, the newsletter of the Norbert Elias Stichting. (The newsletter is free of charge and can be ordered at the secretariat of the Norbert Elias Stichting, JJ. Viottastraat 13, NL 1071 JM Amsterdam or via [Elias@planet.nl](mailto:Elias@planet.nl)).

In the January edition 2013 the following **books** were reviewed or listed as new releases:

Alikhani, Behrouz: Institutionelle Entdemokratisierungsprozesse: Zum Nachhinkeffekt des sozialen Habitus in Frankreich, Iran und Deutschland. Wiesbaden 2012.

Dalal, Farhad: Thought Paralysis: The Virtues of Discrimination. London 2012.

Deakings, John R.: Making Sense of Us: An Essay on Human Meaning. Vancouver 2011.

Deluermoz, Quentin (ed.): Elias et le XX siècle: La processus de civilisation à l'épreuve. Paris 2012.

Dunning, Eric/Hughes, Jason: Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology: Knowledge, Interdependence, Power, Process. London 2012.

Heinich, Natalie: De la visibilité. Paris 2012.

Imbusch, Peter (ed.): Macht und Herrschaft: Sozialwissenschaftliche Theorien und Konzeptionen. 2. überarbeitete Auflage. Wiesbaden 2012.

Joly, Marc: Devenir Norbert Elias: Histoire croisée d'un processus de reconnaissance scientifique: la réception française. Paris 2012.

Krieken, Robert van: Celebrity Society. London 2012.

- Perulli, Angela (ed.): *Fare sviluppo: Identità, luoghi, trasformazione in un'area della Toscana*. Milan 2009.
- Rohloff, Amanda: *Climate Change, moral panic and Civilization: On the development of global warming as a social problem*. PhD-Thesis, Brunel University, London 2012.
- Spier, Fred: *Big History and the Future of Humanity*. Oxford 2011.
- Spierenburg, Pieter: *Violence and Punishment: Civilizing the body through time*. Cambridge 2012.
- Vertigans, Stephen: *The Sociology of Terrorism. People, Places and Processes*. London 2012.

## Abbreviations

- BJS     British Journal of Sociology
- KZfSS   Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozial-  
psychologie
- ZfS     Zeitschrift für Soziologie

# Illustrations

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**Fig. 1** Photocopy of the pre-print of 1937, private property.

**Fig. 2 and Fig. 3** Photos from Norbert Elias's private property.

**Fig. 4** Courtesy of the university archive of Breslau.

**Fig. 5** Courtesy of the Leo Baeck Institute, Jerusalem.

**Fig. 6 and Fig. 7** Photos from private property (first publication, see *Human Figurations Essays for/Aufsätze für Norbert Elias*, Amsterdam 1977).

**Fig. 8** Courtesy of Gisèle Freund, Paris.