

Figurations

Newsletter of the Norbert Elias Foundation

■ EDITORIAL: BEYOND ELIAS

It is far from the intention of the Norbert Elias Foundation, in initiating this twice-yearly newsletter, to foster a cult of the dead. In his lifetime, Elias was often accused of wanting to attract "disciples" and to form a "theoretical school" in sociology. He always denied it. For he was at once both less ambitious and more ambitious than the charge suggests.

Less, because he had no wish to lay down a fixed set of doctrines of the type, often based on some philosophical or political stance, which underlie so many "perspectives" in sociology. He wanted rather to encourage people to pursue through further research some of the problems of humans' life together to which he had drawn attention. In this modest ambition of initiating a research tradition he had some belated success. Younger researchers in many countries and most of the social sciences - anthropology, history, political science and social psychology, as well as sociology - have taken up ideas from Elias, criticised, tested, extended and modified them. We shall be reporting some of their work in this and future issues of this newsletter.

On the other hand, Elias also had a far greater ambition. He believed he had diagnosed many of the faults which beset the social sciences throughout his long lifetime, and he wanted his

insights to find acceptance among social scientists in general. To establish a mere "school" would not assist, and would very likely frustrate, the attainment of that objective.

Elias's dissatisfaction with what he called the "lamentable" state of contemporary sociology - especially because of sociologists' "retreat into the present", their abandonment of the big questions about human society, and the fragmentation of the human sciences - is now widely shared. Several distinguished American sociologists - Peter Berger, Irving Louis Horowitz, Andrew Abbott and Immanuel Wallerstein - have recently expressed similar sentiments.* Indeed Wallerstein has announced an international commission, sponsored by the Gulbenkian Foundation, with the ambitious goal of "restructuring the social sciences".

Not all was gloom even in Elias's lifetime. True, during the middle decades of his life, most sociologists were indifferent to the issues that most concerned him - which might be succinctly described as the connections between power, behaviour, emotions and knowledge in long-term perspective. But even before he died there were strong signs of these once more becoming central questions for social scientists. One only has to mention the acclaim accorded the works of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu. It is touching to learn that, in the last years of his life, Fou-

cault, for his own pleasure and private use, translated Elias's *The Loneliness of the Dying* into French. And Bourdieu, in his tribute on Elias's 90th birthday in 1987, in effect retrospectively claimed Elias as one of his own intellectual forebears. If these are striking instances of the meeting of great minds, they are only the tip of a sizeable iceberg that has floated the interconnections through time of power, behaviour and knowledge back into the centre of social scientists' concerns.

This newsletter will therefore have several purposes. For those who, in various countries, are using Elias's ideas in their own research, we shall serve as a notice board keeping them abreast of each other's work. But our broader objective is to serve as one channel for the wider intellectual stream which is flowing, if not actually under Elias's influence, then at least in the same direction.

Stephen Menzell

* Peter Berger, "Sociology: A Disinvitation", *Dialogue* No. 102, 4/1993, pp.38-42; I.L. Horowitz, *The Decomposition of Sociology*, New York: Oxford University Press, 1993; Andrew Abbott, "History and Sociology: The Lost Synthesis", in E.H. Monkkonen, ed., *Engaging the Past: The Uses of History across the Social Sciences*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994; Immanuel Wallerstein et al. "Announcement: Gulbenkian Commission of the Restructuring of the Social Sciences", Fernand Braudel Center, SUNY Binghamton, October 1993.

■ THE NORBERT ELIAS FOUNDATION

The Norbert Elias Foundation was established on the initiative of Norbert Elias himself on 14 January, 1983. At his wish, the members of the Board of Trustees were Johan Goudsblom, Hermann Korte and Abram van Stolk.

During the last years of Elias's life, the Foundation organised and sponsored several activities. Two occasions stand out in particular. In June 1984, a conference was organised at the Zentrum für Interdisziplinäre Forschung at Bielefeld, on "Civilisation and Theories of Civilising Processes: Comparative Perspectives". Among the participants, besides Elias himself, were Keith Hopkins, William McNeill, and Immanuel Wallerstein. In June 1987, Elias's 90th birthday was the occasion for a conference on "Process and Progress" at Apeldoorn in the Netherlands; here it was mainly members of a younger generation who were given the opportunity to present papers and enter into discussion with Elias. This conference was followed by a festive meeting in the University of Amsterdam with speeches by Pierre Bourdieu, Maarten Brands, Siegfried Unseld and Bryan Wilson.

When Elias died on 1 August 1990, the Foundation was his sole legatee. The first duty of the trustees was to organise the cremation and, a few months later, a memorial meeting which was held in Amsterdam on 3 November. Since then it has managed to obtain a grant from the Thyssen Stichting for making a complete inventory of Elias's papers and possessions. This very time-consuming task was performed by Rudolf Knijff and Saskia Visser, who completed their work in February 1994. It was then decided that all Elias's papers, including manuscripts and letters, would be transferred to the Schiller Literaturarchiv in Marbach, Germany.*

Another initiative was the establishment of a Norbert Elias Chair in the Sociology of Long-Term Processes

at the University of Utrecht. The first incumbent of this chair, Nico Wilterdink, delivered his inaugural lecture on 8 September 1993, on the subject of "Inequality and Interdependence: Developments in Property Relations".

The Board has not been successful in all its activities. It tried to raise funds for maintaining the apartment in Amsterdam in which Elias spent the last years of his life. In spite of the support of an illustrious committee of diplomats, politicians, scholars, and writers, these attempts failed to yield the financial resources needed to establish a Norbert Elias House.

From 1 April, 1994, the Foundation moved to a smaller office at Viottastraat 13, Amsterdam. The office will continue to be run jointly by Rudolf Knijff and by Saskia Visser, who will act as Executive Secretary. In the immediate future, the Board sees its main activities as being: (1) a continued concern for the publication of Elias's writings, including the selection and editing of posthumous work, the preparation of a standard edition of collected works, and the promotion of translations; and (2) the organisation of conferences where Elias's work will be discussed and continued. A third, more general, objective is furthering by all conceivable means "figurational" or "process sociology" as it was developed by Elias. The Newsletter fits very well into this objective.

Johan Goudsblom

* Further details of the services provided by the Marbach archive will be given in the next issue of *Figurations* towards the end of 1994.

■ NORBERT ELIAS AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

Paris, 7-8 April 1994

Bernard Lacroix and Alain Garrigou of the Groupe d'analyse politique, DEA de Sociologie politique at the Université de Paris X Nanterre, organised what is thought to be the first

conference in France devoted solely to exploring the significance of Elias's work for contemporary social science. It was held at the dynamic new Institut International de Paris La Défense, in the heart of La Défense, not far from the Grande Arche. Around 100 people attended, and the figure might have been higher, had the first day not coincided with a public transport strike in Paris!

The papers presented are to be published later, but we list them here briefly and in English translation, session by session:

1. ELIAS THE MAN AND POLITICS

- Bernard Lacroix (Nanterre): *Norbert Elias, Politics and History*
- Cathérine Colliot-Thélène (ENS): *The Concept of Rationalisation: From Max Weber to Norbert Elias*
- Philippe Chailan (Nanterre): *Aspects of the Sociogenesis of Norbert Elias's Political Thought*
- Jacqueline Blondel (Sorbonne): *Links and regularities in the "cultural sciences" according to Nietzsche, Weber and Elias*
- Alain Garrigou (Nanterre): *Scientia Ludens: Norbert Elias, Games and Society*

2. NATIONAL HABITUS AND STATE-FORMATION

- André Burguière (EHESS): *Civilising Process and National Process: Norbert Elias and the Formation of the Original Characteristics of French Culture*
- Moncef Djaziri (Lausanne): *Norbert Elias' Contribution to the analysis of state-formation*
- Gérard Noiriel (ENS): *National Habitus*
- Guillaume Devin (Rennes): *Norbert Elias and International Relations*

3. MANNERS AND CIVILISING PROCESSES

- Stephen Mennell (Dublin): *The Other Side of the Coin: Decivilising Processes*
- Guillaume Courty (Nanterre): *Psychic Economy and the Formation of Social Groups*
- Claudine Haroche and Anna Montoya (Amiens): *Psychic Economy and Political System: Norbert Elias's Historical Psychology*
- Charles Henry (Nanterre): *From Servant-Musician to Free Artist: Towards a Theory of Individuation*

4. WORKING WITH ELIAS

- Johan Goudsblom (Amsterdam): *Thinking with Norbert Elias*

- Frédéric Neyrat (Bordeaux III): *Norbert Elias, Sociologist of Savoir-Faire*
- Jacques Defrance (Paris XI Orsay): *The Taste for Violence*
- Éric Phélippeau (Nanterre): *The Sociogenesis of the Political Profession*
- Delphine Dulong (Sorbonne): *Court Society and the Image of the President under the Fifth Republic*

■ AT LAST! THE CIVILISING PROCESS IN ONE VOLUME!

Über den Prozess der Zivilisation, not only Norbert Elias's best-known work but also the foundation-stone for all his subsequent writings, was from its first obscure publication in 1939 a two-volume work. But at least that was always made clear to readers of the German edition, which was re-issued unchanged (except for the addition of a new Introduction) in 1969.

Great confusion arose when an English translation was published. Not only were the two volumes published four years apart (in 1978 and 1982), but they had separate titles, so that the reader had to be keen-eyed to spot that they were two halves of the same book. At least the first volume appeared under the same title - *The History of Manners* - both in Britain and the USA. The second volume suffered the appalling fate of being published under two different titles: *State-Formation and Civilisation in Britain, Power and Civility in the USA*.

Judging from citation indices, although many American social scientists spotted the first volume, scarcely any of them read the second half of the book. By the 1980s, many were interested in state formation processes, but the American title led them away from that important part of Elias's theory; and although the expression "civility" crops up in American sociology, as a static concept it wholly fails to capture the character of Elias's processual thinking. Above all, unless the two volumes are read as one book, one cannot grasp the crucial links Elias traces between power and behaviour, between the "macro" and the "micro" levels of development.

Now at last a one-volume edition of *The Civilising Process* has been published (Blackwell, Oxford, 1994; xvii + 558 pp.; ISBN 0-631-19221-2 (hb), 0-631-19222-0 (pb)). This should certainly help to make Elias's magnum opus better understood in the anglophone world. It is a great pity that, even though the text has been completely reset for this edition, the publishers have failed to make any corrections to the original English edition. They have even carried over the original contents page, with its numerous errors and omissions, despite having been supplied with lists of corrections. One is tempted to remark, "Oh well, publishers are like that", but that might be considered unfair and ungrateful.

Three other books by Elias will also shortly be published in English. *Reflections on a Lifetime* and *The Germans: Studies of Power-Struggles and the Development of Habitus in the 19th and 20th Centuries* will both soon be issued by Polity Press. (Eric Dunning and Stephen Menell are still in the throes of revising the translation of the latter.) Sage are republishing *The Established and the Outsiders*, complete with the long introductory essay that Elias later wrote for the Dutch edition and which has never appeared in English.



■ SOME RECENT BOOKS AND THESES

Fred Spier, *Religious Regimes in Peru: Religion and State Development in Long-Term Perspective*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 1994. ISBN 90 5356 053 X. Dfl 65 (paperback)/ISBN 90 53566 0521. Dfl 89,50 (hard cover)

This study deals with religion and politics in Peru from the beginning of agrarianisation until 1991. Of central importance for the analysis are state formation and development, the rela-

tions between church and state, the internal and external relations within and among the various religious groupings. These national themes are illustrated at a local level by the examination of the history of an Andean village, situated near Cusco. The general part of the book is based on archival documents and studies by archaeologists, historians and social anthropologists. The reconstruction of village history was possible through the study of local church books and documents in archives in Peru and Spain. In addition the author did field research in the village. This very long-term investigation is among the first of its kind. It is also an exploration of the concept "religious regime" as an analytical tool.

Geert de Vries, *Het pedagogisch regime: groei en grenzen van de geschoolde samenleving*. (The Educational Regime: Growth and Limitations of the Schooled Society.) Amsterdam: Meulenhoff, 1993. ISBN 90 290 4622 8. Dfl 34,50.

This book discusses educational expansion as the unintended result of a progressive figurational constraint people have come to exert on each other and themselves. From the sixteenth century onwards, political elites have sought to expand the supply of education in order to unify their nation, strengthen their internal position, discipline the lower classes, and bring about economic modernization. The use of education to these ends was stimulated by the symbiosis of the ruling elites of the emergent states in Northwest Europe with Protestantism, and the entrepreneurship of educational professionals and progressive factions of the bourgeoisie. When elementary schooling surmounted a threshold, the Industrial Revolution transformed production relations, and anonymous labour emerged, employers started treating educational credentials as screening devices, thereby stimulating school attendance. By the end of the nineteenth century, rising standards of living enabled the lower classes to aspire to education. The higher classes responded to this threat by attending secondary schools, colleges and universities. Education became the cen-

tral arena of class struggle. In the twentieth century, educational expansion became both demand-driven and self-propelling. Compulsory education has developed into a schooling compulsion. Like health care and social security, education has reached social limits to growth. Fierce status competition within education has a psychological cost: a chronic fear of failure. Also, education serves as a lightning rod for existential uncertainties and political problems outside education. The expansion of education has been accompanied by credential inflation, forcing people to invest more in education than would be optimal from the point of view of collective welfare, and eroding the intrinsic or practical value of education and the enjoyment of it.

Rob van Ginkel, *Tussen Scylla en Charybdis: Een ethnohistorie van Texels vissersvolk (1813-1932)*. (Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: An ethnohistory of Texel Fisher Folk (1813-1932)) Amsterdam: Het Spinhuis, 1993. ISBN 9073052696.

This ethnohistory is based on archival research and anthropological field-work conducted in two villages on the Dutch island of Texel. The study covers the period between 1813 and 1932 and focuses on fishermen's adaptations to ecological, economic and social change within the context of their modes of production, socio-political organization and culture. It aims to contribute to the debate on common property resource use. Central to this discussion is Hardin's 'tragedy of the commons' proposition, which states that exploitation of commons will inevitably lead to resource abuse and ecological deterioration. The author examines whether and to what extent this proposition and similar theoretical models bear contextualization. This requires a process oriented approach, delineating the fishermen's individual and collective adaptive strategies, the intended and unintended consequences of their behavior, and the feedback processes which gave rise to new coping responses. The description of the 'economy of flexibility' is followed by a processual portrait of community life in both villages, indicating the widely different ways in which the fis-

hermen coped with their ecological, economic, and social environments. It is argued that Hardin's tragedy of the commons thesis and similar propositions do have some heuristic value, but are of limited use as statements about the real world. The stereotypical image figuring in such theoretical statements, to wit that fishermen are greedy, selfish and non-communicative individualists, is a mythical abstraction.

Annet Mooij, *Geslachtsziekten en besmettingsangst: Een historisch-sociologische studie, 1850-1990*. (Venereal Disease and Fear of Infection. A historical sociological study, 1850-1990.) Amsterdam: Boom, 1993. ISBN 90-5352-092-9. Dfl. 43,50

This study of the fight against venereal disease in the Netherlands from 1850 to the very recent past reviews the various efforts to control venereal disease and discusses the changing ideas underlying these efforts in their historical and social context. A distinction is drawn between narrators and personages in the venereal disease debate. Narrators speak or write on venereal disease, set forth their views and their solutions. In their treatises they present characters to illustrate their views: the personages held more or less responsible for the spread of venereal disease. It is shown that fluctuations in the vehemence of the venereal disease debate cannot be satisfactorily explained by the objective danger of venereal disease or by fluctuations in its prevalence. A more fruitful explanation lies in the distinction between narrators and personages. Relations between these two categories, though constantly changing, turned out to be comprehensible in terms of three kinds of wider power relations: between social classes, between men and women, and between doctors and patients. It was primarily from changes in these relations that the venereal disease debate derived its dynamics. In retrospect, the debate exhibits some striking developments. They concern the way the venereal disease debate implicated the control of sexual behaviour. Here a growing confidence in self-control came to the fore as external control was replaced by individual responsibility and com-

pulsory measures were replaced by voluntary behavioural changes.

Steven B. Russell, *Manners of Oppression: Norbert Elias and the Historical Sociology of European Jewry*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Monash University, Clayton (Melbourne), Australia, 1994.

The author pursues a dual objective. He illuminates a number of hitherto and puzzling aspects of the history of Jews in Europe by using a figurational or process-sociological approach. And, taking note of Norbert Elias's own German-Jewish descent, he sheds light on the roots and general character of the sociological synthesis to which Elias sought to contribute. Russell clarifies and highlights in novel ways such things as: the distinctive financial role played by Jews in medieval European states; the process of ghettoisation that occurred from the 16th century onwards; the role of the "Court Jews" in the era of absolutism; the problem of Jewish emancipation in the 18th and 19th centuries; and the problems of assimilation faced by Jews in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany, problems which were exacerbated by the immigration of Jews from the East (Ostjuden).

CONTRIBUTIONS

The next issue of *Figurations* will be mailed in early December 1994. News and notes should be sent to the Editor, Stephen Mennell, in Dublin, by 1 November.

Annette Treibel has agreed to act as Corresponding Editor for Germany, Helmut Kuzmics for Austria, Kitty Verrips for The Netherlands. Volunteers are sought from other countries to expand our international coverage.

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