

Drawing Elias – Sketches from Four Interviews

Jason Hughes and John Goodwin

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Interviews

‘An interview in Bloomington, Indiana’ (1982) Interview with Gregor Hahn. First published in *West European Center Newsletter*, University of Indiana, Bloomington, IN.

‘We still haven’t learnt to control nature and ourselves enough’ (1984) Interview with Aafke Steenhuis. First published in *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 16 May 1984. Translated from the Dutch by Robert van Krieken.

‘We should not let ourselves be misled’ (1987) Interview with Martin-Jochen Schulz. First published as ‘Man darf sich nicht Ire machen lassen’: ein Gespräch mit neunzigjährigen Norbert Elias’, *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 22 June 1987. Translated from the German by Edmund Jephcott.

‘In reality, we are all late barbarians’ (1989) Interview with Helmut Hetzel. First published as ‘Norbert Elias: im Grunde sind wir alle späte Barbaren’, *Die Welt*, 11 December 1989. Translated from the German by Edmund Jephcott.

Introduction

The four interviews that we take as the source material for this overview were all considered for inclusion in the forthcoming volume, *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections* (Jephcott *et al.* Elias, 2013), volume 17 of the Elias Collected Works. The volume, due for publication in late 2013, contains some thirteen interviews, including previously unpublished biographical materials and transcripts that are for the first time available in English. The interviews we consider here were ultimately not included in *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections* owing principally to their overlap with, and repetition of, some of the other biographical sources. Their having been so close to inclusion in the volume, and having been translated into English, it would have been something of a wasted opportunity to omit their publication altogether. Accordingly, partly by virtue of our interest in aspects of Elias’s biography and his sociology more generally (see, for example, Goodwin and Hughes 2011), we were presented with the chance to provide for this edition of *Human Figurations* a short introduction to the interviews, together with the interviews in their totality. Three of the interviews were originally published in mainstream periodicals – the Dutch weekly paper *De Groene Amsterdammer*, and two German newspapers, the daily *Frankfurter Rundschau*, and the weekly *Die Welt* – and thus are dominated by discussions of current affairs. The fourth was conducted by the American political scientist Gregor Hahn, and was presented to a largely academic readership in the *West European Center Newsletter* (now entitled *West European Studies*). Our discussion here, and the interviews themselves, are thus included in this special section as a kind of prelude to the publication of what is to be the penultimate volume of the Collected Works. However, beyond their serving in this precursory capacity, we explore below how the interviews can also shed light on a particular phase of Elias’s academic career, and are in themselves significant and valuable. We

argue that the interviews hold value not simply in terms of the responses Elias provides, but also in their presentation of different intellectual ‘sketches’ or ‘drawings’ of Elias in relation to what the interviewers considered to be the pressing social, cultural and political concerns of the day. This manner of treating the interviews as ‘relational clues’ stems from an approach to analysing documents as part and parcel of human figurations that we have been developing in our current work (see, again, Goodwin and Hughes 2011, and Hughes and Goodwin 2013).

Background to the Interviews

Conducted during the 1980s, spanning the period 1982–1989, the interviews were undertaken when Elias’s work was finally coming to gain the more widespread recognition it deserved. It was around this time that *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* was for the first time being made available in English to an Anglophone audience with the publication by Blackwell of volume one under the title, *The History of Manners* (1978) and volume two entitled *State Formation and Civilization* (1982), together with a growing number of English language versions of some of his other major works. Elias’s intellectual recognition was during this period also becoming formally recognised. Notably, he was the first recipient of the Theodore Adorno prize (1977), [1][#N1] and then later of the Amalfi prize (1988). It was also in the late 1970s and early 1980s that Elias’s celebrity had moved from solely academic circles towards a wider intellectual public (Mennell, 1993: 24). Indeed, three of the interviews we discuss here – specifically, those with the journalists Steenhuis, Schulz and Hetzel – formed part and parcel of this more general transition.

In the 1980s, Elias was still busily working on some of his key papers and books – notably his essays on scientific establishments, scientific and literary utopias, Popper and nominalism, and the retreat of sociologists to the present; *The Quest for Excitement* (together with Eric Dunning); the series of essays that would subsequently form the basis for *Involvement and Detachment*; *The Society of Individuals*; *An Essay on Time*; the German translation of *The Established and the Outsiders*; and *The Symbol Theory*. Direct reference is made to some of these publications in the interviews. As is sometimes the case when one is consumed with the work of the moment, Elias’s answers to interviewers’ questions were often framed in relation to these works, sometimes explicitly, more often implicitly – we shall discuss a few examples in our reflections later in this paper. In addition, it is evident that during this phase of his career, Elias was also keen to correct the somewhat superficial impression that *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* represented the primary corpus of his sociological ideas, with his other subsequent works mere extensions or developments of this central thesis. In his interview with Hetzel, Elias explicitly makes the point that *On the Process of Civilisation* constitutes but one strand of his considerably more comprehensive body of work. Elias notes that he considers his ‘little work on symbols’ – *The Symbol Theory* – to be ‘at least as important’ as his work on civilising processes, and makes a forward reference to the German translation of *The Established and the Outsiders* – the theory of which, he suggests, has the potential to prove ‘very fertile’.

Becoming Norbert Elias

This was also a period in which Elias was completing his autobiographical essay, ‘Notes on a lifetime’. [2][#N2]. It is perhaps surprising to remember that until the publication of this autobiographical commentary – first in German in 1984 (see Gleichmann, Goudsblom and Korte 1984), later included in the book *Reflections on a Life* (Elias 1994), initially published in Dutch in 1987 but not available in English until 1994 – that little was known of Elias’s life history, and of the specific lineage and intellectual ascendancy of his work. Thus, these

interviews were conducted at a time when Elias's star was on the rise, but at which information about his life, and specifically his own autobiographical writings, was not readily available. This meant that interviews such as the four included in this special section represented for many the first initial glimpses into Elias's own biography. Indeed, on reading them it soon becomes readily apparent that all of the interviewers shared an interest in linking aspects of Elias's biographical experiences with the development of his sociological position, and with more specific themes in his work. For example, Hahn (1982) begins with the question 'Professor Elias, might we begin by solving some of the problems presented by scant biographical information on your own long-term process?' Similarly, Hetzel (1989) prompts Elias to reflect upon whether he (Elias) himself is 'happy' in the context of a more general discussion of the degree of Elias's sociological 'optimism' relating to questions regarding the prospects for the reunification of Germany, the aversion of possible environmental catastrophe, and the avoidance of nuclear war. Furthermore, while responding to Schulz's (1987) questioning around the burden of history, with specific regard to the damage wrought by the Second World War on German National identity, Elias is compelled to reveal the importance to him of his (Elias's) own German *Gymnasium* education.

Perhaps the most noteworthy example of this tendency is provided by Steenhuis (1984) who ends her interview with a series of direct biographical questions, and yet chooses to recount this part of the interview at the start of the transcript as a means of implicitly foregrounding its significance for Elias's more general set of responses. In the opening paragraph Steenhuis asks, for example, 'There is little known about your life, I say, I don't even know, for example, whether you have ever been married'. Elias answers that he has never been married, and explains this in terms of his focus upon the task of his work, implying that a life partner might have distracted him away from this. In part, we might understand Steenhuis's privileging of the auto/biographical aspects of Elias's work as a response to the dearth of information about him during this period. However, equally, while Steenhuis acknowledges the impact upon and resonance of Elias's ideas in the Netherlands, in places she seemingly attempts to make the interview one of 'human interest', presumably as a partial consequence of her journalistic sensibilities. Steenhuis was then (1974–1990) the editor for culture and Latin America for *De Groene Amsterdammer*, a long-established, highly respected, left-leaning publication which exemplifies a tradition in Dutch public intellectual life of spanning the academy and mainstream audiences. To this end, she may have felt compelled to offer something of Elias's 'back story', to provide a 'glimpse' of the 'man behind the ideas' such that his writings could be understood to be more grounded and perhaps more amenable to identification by the non-specialist.

However, in addition to such sensibilities, a more specific sociological argument – one that Elias himself was further developing around the time of these interviews – might be advanced concerning the tendencies exhibited by Steenhuis and some of the other interviewers we consider here. In short, the interviewers' attempts to focus upon the intersections between Elias's biography and his sociology can in part be understood as part of a tradition of intellectual historiography characterised by the 'situating' and/or 'locating' of the work of notable 'thinkers', typically in relation to the context of other thinkers, and other traditions of thought.

Drawing Elias

The general tenor of Steenhuis's interview is one of testing Elias's intellectual pedigree, of checking his political credentials, and of exploring the extent of his knowledge about non-European cultures in particular. This forms an integral part of how she has 'drawn' Elias as an intellectual figure. There is a section in which Steenhuis asks Elias what he reads, and in particular whether he has 'read much on other cultures'; she specifically mentions Buddhism as a possible example. Elias answers, 'No, that doesn't suit me'. Steenhuis

responds by laughing, saying ‘I thought so!’ This undercurrent of intellectual sparring characterises the tone of the interview, but is also related to Steenhuis’s attempt to test Elias’s knowledge of the political situation of countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa. If we were to speculate, we might hypothesise that Steenhuis is here attempting to explore the extent to which Elias is a Eurocentric theorist, full of Enlightenment optimism about the scientific and technical ‘advances’ of ‘the West’, and at that, one who is somewhat ignorant of the ‘wisdoms we have lost’ from ‘the rest’. Indeed, such charges have long been voiced against Elias and his ideas concerning civilising processes, and may have formed part of the intellectual backdrop for this interview. Elias’s responses are again noteworthy. He doggedly refuses to be ‘drawn’ into either a pessimistic or optimistic stance concerning what we might call the ‘prospects of the present’. Indeed, when he speculates here and elsewhere on the chances for lasting peace, the successful reunification of Germany, and the dissipation of tensions between the then Soviet Union and the USA, hindsight enables us to observe how Elias often errs too much on the side of caution. [3],[#N3]

As a continuation of this line of questioning, Steenhuis presents in the interview a variant of the ‘noble savage’ argument: she states, for example, ‘But what you come across in Latin America and find in Latin American literature is the imagination, the feel for history, for connection, the tie with nature, with other people, magic. We’ve lost that to a large extent’. Similarly, Steenhuis laments Western triumphalism concerning the taming of nature, pre-empting some of the arguments later developed by Ulrich Beck (1992 [1986]) in *Risk Society*, by noting the ‘boomerang effects’ of technological developments: ‘We think that we’ve tamed nature, but isn’t it now turning back on us? The air, the earth, the forests have been attacked, and are now in turn attacking us’. Elias responds unequivocally, ‘No, what you call “nature” is a cold, wild deserted chaos. The impression arising from what you say is that nature is good when it’s untamed’. Elias later extends the point in response to further questioning about how ‘Western cultures try to dominate’. He says:

Have you ever really lived among the wild? Were things that much better? I really think quite differently about this: I believe that we haven’t yet learned to control nature and ourselves enough, we have to learn to do it better. The future certainly doesn’t lead back to the wild, to primitive societies’.

Elias’s response here is in particular consistent with the thesis he was then finalising in a series of essays that were subsequently to be brought together in the book *Involvement and Detachment* (Elias 2007). To state it rather simply, a major theme in *Involvement and Detachment* centres on a consideration of the specific problems that arise from the development of a relatively stable and expansive stock of knowledge in the natural sciences and, in relation to this, a relatively large degree of human control over non-human nature, coupled with comparatively rudimentary knowledge of, and control over, the sphere of human figurations. Here and elsewhere Elias is noticeably animated in his responses concerning the tendency for a younger generation to denounce the ‘West’ as ‘the worst thing on earth’. In this connection, again in the interview with Steenhuis, he draws a rather mischievous simile with ‘the whore who turns pious in her old age... Father I have sinned, and now I repent’.

The key point that we might draw from this observation is that, despite his own biographical circumstances, or perhaps indeed partly because of these, Elias was throughout these interviews careful to avoid dismissing the ascendancy of Western civilisation, and the (then) contemporary socio-cultural milieu, as ‘the worst form of life and one that is doomed’ (Elias 2012: 8). As Nathalie Heinich has observed, a markedly consistent characteristic of Elias’s sociological work is his continuous attempt to channel the *ressentiment* of his experiences as an exiled Jew whose parents were murdered by the Nazis (amongst other traumatic episodes in his life) into a kind of sociological detour *via* detachment (Heinich 2012) – one involving a characteristically

‘Eliasian’ blend of ‘dispassionate involvement’ and ‘passionate detachment’ (Dunning and Hughes 2013: 157–161). In this respect, unlike Beck who foresaw the distribution of ‘bads’ – the unintended consequences of planned interventions in the world on the basis of rational scientific knowledge – as coming to eclipse the distribution of ‘goods’ as the primary logic of social distribution in late modernity, Elias always sought to understand such ‘boomerang effects’ as central problems for investigation, without forgetting the *specific* ‘progresses’ [4],[#N4] that, for example, programmes of mass vaccination and increasing knowledge about agriculture and hygiene have thus far also been able to secure, albeit not for humanity as a whole. The ratio of intended relative to unintended consequences following from particular technological developments or programmes of scientific intervention – for it is indeed best conceived as a ratio of ‘goods’ and ‘bads’ (to adopt Beck’s language for the moment) – is for Elias anything but a foregone conclusion, and is always a question to be explored on simultaneously theoretical and empirical planes in relation to specific and concrete examples (see, for a fuller discussion of this issue, Dunning and Hughes 2012). [5],[#N5] Indeed, to continue the comparison, Beck’s work on risk very largely leaves unexplored the long-term processes of internal pacification that processes of technological expansion, and the centralisation of natural scientific consciousness, are in part predicated upon.

It is possible to observe similar forms of response elsewhere in the interviews. For example, in the later interview with Helmut Hetzel, Elias is asked whether he is a ‘Green’ as part of a more general series of questions on the environment and, once again, the unintended consequences of technological developments and interventions. Hetzel asks, ‘But technology and its accomplishments are a two-edged sword, are they not? Technology can have positive and negative consequences’. Elias responds thus:

You are right. People today are ruthlessly destroying their own habitation. That must be regarded as one of the unplanned consequences of planned actions. That happens again and again. Of course, people have not planned to destroy their environment. That is an unplanned and unwanted by-product of actions with other objectives. That was not foreseeable.

Hetzel presses the point, ‘Is not the felling of the tropical rain forests in Brazil a planned action?’ Elias continues:

Certainly, that is a planned action. But what is planned in the first place is to use the timber. What is not planned is to threaten humanity by doing so. There simply are different human interests. Some people want timber and others come along and say, ‘you are destroying the rain-forest’. It is our task to correct the unacceptable consequences of planned actions with as much equanimity and patience as possible. In Germany today there is, for understandable reasons, a strong tendency to deny all progress and to stress only the evils of our time. That is just as wrong and dangerous as the tendency to see only progress and to shut one’s eyes to the evils.

Taken together, Steenhuis’s questioning of Elias’s knowledge of non-Western cultures, and Hetzel’s checking of Elias’s green credentials, form part of a more general tendency for interviewers to attempt to ‘draw’ Elias towards an identifiable stance on the political, social, and cultural concerns of the day, and then in turn, to ‘draw’ links between this and aspects of his specific biography. As we have suggested above, such a tendency in many ways mirrors a tradition in Western thought that affords primacy to the ‘history of ideas’. In this tradition, the focus is typically upon ‘great men’ and how they have each made a significant contribution to the development of a particular scientific field – a tendency aptly captured by the ironic title of Ralph Fevre and Angus Bancroft’s recent (2010) book on the development of key sociological ideas, *Dead White Men and*

Other Important People. Elias has long been critical of such an approach to understanding the development of knowledge, and instead favoured a focus upon the ‘nexus of the sequential order’ involved in the discoveries that practitioners from different scientific fields collectively make (Elias 1972; 2009a). To this end, he used the analogy of swimmers in a stream of knowledge: while some swimmers are able to swim further or faster than others, they are inevitably dependent on those who came before them, on their contemporaries, and on the stock of communicable knowledge, which together comprise the stream of knowledge into which each individual swimmer – each researcher – might ‘take a dip’. For Elias, the more important question, then, was to consider the social, psychic, and institutional conditions (and indeed, the inter-connections between these) under which knowledge in particular fields might expand and/or decay – to focus upon the ‘reconstruction’ of the ‘sequential order’ that enabled certain discoveries in particular fields to be developed (Elias 1972; Elias 2009a). His evident irritation in relation to questions concerning certain details of his biography and his political views on various issues, and his more general reluctance to talk much about his own life (Jephcott *et al*, 2013: 9), thus are arguably as much to do with his overall sociological stance as, say, any inclination towards personal reserve or guardedness concerning aspects of his personal politics and his private life.

Elias the Outsider

Given Elias’s views on the development of knowledge and the sciences as invariably collective and dynamic endeavours, it is perhaps somewhat ironic that he sometimes depicts his own sociological position as emerging Athena-like – fully formed from the head of Zeus (see Elias 1971; 2009a) – relatively independent of those other sociological ‘swimmers’ who were his contemporaries and forebears, and typically in splendid isolation from those who comprised the ‘sociological establishment’ (Van Krieken 1998: 29).

The Hahn (1982) interview contains a brief exchange on *The Established and The Outsiders* in which the interviewer asks if there is a ‘personal element’ to the themes of the book. Elias responds: ‘That is quite possible, yes. And certainly I was an outsider in relation to the sociological establishment... the Polish Jews, too, were outsiders; and the German Jews, although some identified strongly with Germany, they were nevertheless outsiders’. Hetzel (1989) also explores the theme of Elias’s somewhat marginal status (albeit that this was becoming decreasingly the case) in relation to the sociological mainstream, and asks him to reflect upon some of the possibilities for why he was ‘ignored’ by the likes of Habermas and Luhmann, and, indeed, if he was offended by their lack of regard. Elias, somewhat characteristically, expands on the issue by pointing out the lack of a ‘common basis for discussion’, noting that his own work represents a point of departure, containing many new ideas, and that such innovations take a long time to be ‘assimilated’.

We can also observe a similar thread of reasoning in his replies to Hahn in relation to Elias’s recounting of how it took a long time for the first edition of *Über den Prozess der Zivilisation* to sell in any kind of sustainable volume, and upon how there was initially no interest at all among English speakers or the broader ‘sociological establishment’. Part of the reason, he suggests, relates to the enterprise of studying long-term processes which, he proposes, has become tarnished by earlier theories of ‘progress’ and ‘evolutionism’. Thus, any engagement with social reality in long-term developmental perspective inevitably fosters the perception – albeit wholly inaccurate in his own case – of working within this naïve nineteenth-century tradition. Such impressions, Elias suggests, served to position his work firmly on the ‘outside’ of then dominant intellectual trends. It is again paradoxical that Elias should understand himself in these terms, particularly since during this phase of his career he had become increasingly inundated with requests for interviews and public commentary and was becoming something of a celebrity in certain intellectual circles (Elias 2013). We might note once more that he had received a number of prestigious academic prizes and honours during this period,

and had witnessed the expansion of significant enclaves of scholars, principally in Amsterdam and Leicester, who were actively engaged in applying and developing his sociological approach. Here and elsewhere Elias, if anything, actively encouraged and cultivated an image of himself as a lone voice, a ‘sociological maverick’, often neglecting to map the influence of the broader ‘intellectual figuration’ within, and in some cases against, which his own position took shape (Van Krieken 1998: 29).

There is something of an antagonism, then, between Elias’s self-image and his sociological imagery. Perhaps this related in part to a kind of unconscious rhetorical strategy on behalf of Elias to encourage other scholars to break from deeply ingrained patterns of thinking about and formulating sociological problems. Such a notion is consistent with the depiction of his work as ‘a point of departure’. Another, perhaps complementary, possibility is that Elias preferred to advance an image of himself as ‘but one link’ in an inter-generational chain of scholars, with notable figures such as Marx and Comte before him, thus invoking a considerably longer *durée* of the development of sociological knowledge. His imagery of the ‘passing of a baton’ in a ‘knowledge relay race’ as an instructive metaphor for the task of future generations of sociologists – for sociologists to see themselves as part of an inter-generational succession – is perhaps more apt in this respect, albeit that some of the contradictions noted above still hold. Indeed, such imagery comes to mind in relation to a specific exchange in his interview with Schulz. Elias states: ‘Today we have basically lost the ability to think of a future. Most people do not want to go beyond their present – they do not like to see themselves as a link in the chain of generations’. In response to which Schulz asks:

Is that easier for you because you have grown up as a man of this century, so to speak, with its extraordinary technical developments and major political and social changes, and its instabilities, whereas today, in our more developed countries, an ever-larger proportion of people no longer perceive the speed of technical development, and are surrounded by relative stability in politics, the economy and society?

And Elias replies:

That is possible. All the same, why do people find it so difficult to place the limited nature of their own existence clearly and unambiguously in view, to realise that they are a link in a process – not the end? We always speak as if we were standing before absolute ends.

Elias was not, of course, alone among sociologists in being a ‘man of the twentieth century’: in having witnessed and experienced first-hand the enormous social and political upheaval that occurred during that century, and having grown up in the ‘shadows’ of the ‘crisis and transformation of Western civilisation’ (Elias, 2012: 8). The extent to which parallels might be drawn between the impact of such experiences on Elias’s sociology in comparison to that of other sociologists of his generation remains a tantalising one (though, again, see Heinich 2012).

Conclusion

In our discussion we have sought to explore ‘the drawing of Elias’ in two key senses. First, we have explored how the interviewers in different ways sought to ‘draw’ Elias on questions relating to the political affairs of the day, and on the possible impact of specific aspects of his biography on his more general sociology. Secondly, we have explored how partly through their questions and through the presentation of their material,

interviewers in different ways presented a particular ‘drawing’ or rendering of Elias – a sketch of Elias the man, and Elias’s sociological position in relation to a series of topics which were very much of their time: the Falklands (Las Malvinas); the development of the European Union; the reunification of Germany; the breakdown of the former ‘Eastern Bloc’; the demise of socialism; questions pertaining to key figures – Gorbachev, Bush, Thatcher and so on. Even the language in which familiar themes are couched is redolent of some of the defining concerns of the 1980s. For example, discussions in the interviews of environmental concerns typically focus upon the ozone ‘hole’ and the felling of Brazilian rainforest rather than, say, global warming and the melting of polar ice caps. We have argued that these biographical and sociological sketches thus tell us as much about the defining debates of the day as they do about Elias’s espoused position in relation to such concerns.

Furthermore, we have sought to draw our own, somewhat tentative, conclusions concerning the significance of these interviews. We have noted their considerable emphasis on aspects of Elias’s biography, and have sought to explain this as, in part, a normal preoccupation of such interviews that has been compounded in these cases by the relative dearth during this period of widely available material on Elias’s life. However, in addition we have traced a tendency towards attempts by interviewers to seek to ‘locate’ Elias, sociologically and politically, after the fashion of intellectual historiography. We have speculated that Elias’s at times notable resistance to be ‘located’ in this manner might in part be based in his sociological critique of such approaches to understanding the development of knowledge and the sciences. To this end, we have noted the inherent paradox between Elias’s self-depiction as something of a lone scholar and outsider to the sociological establishment and his sociological approach which, if he were to have turned its full force upon himself, might have compelled him to examine in more detail the figurational conditions under which his own ‘breakthroughs’ became possible, in particular the importance of the formative intellectual climates of Heidelberg, Paris and London to the development of his sociological position. That he largely did not do so is, we have suggested, in itself worthy of some further consideration (see, once more, the translation of Elias’s ‘Notizen zum Lebenslauf’ [‘Notes on a lifetime’] a revised and annotated translation of which will appear in *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections*).

In a modest way the interviews do indeed tell something of Elias’s own ‘becoming’ (Korte 1997), not least because they are undertaken at a particularly important phase in his academic career. In focusing our discussion, we have omitted a number of other possible themes, commonalities and analytical possibilities that will no doubt become apparent through a first-hand consideration of the interviews. These include Elias the scholar – the interviews reveal a man fully committed to continuing with his ‘work’ in a working space where, in the case of his apartment in Amsterdam, he was surrounded by the African Art he collected while in Ghana. This is in many ways reminiscent of Freud and his collection of small statutes and Egyptian sculptures (see Gamwell 1989). Other notable thematic currents in the interviews include Elias’s working relationships with others; his personal experiences of Nazi Germany and Ghana; his writings on age and death and the problem of an ‘old man’ writing about these topics during a period where he had faced death himself; the sociogenesis of his principal works; and his position on the relationship between ‘drive control’ and what he refers to in one interview as ‘ideological disarmament’. Also noteworthy is Elias’s tendency to correct his interviewers, sometimes with a degree of apparent frustration. This is particularly the case when questions are framed in terms of ideals – ‘the human’, ‘nature’, ‘the fully civilised person’, and so forth – and/or are formulated statically. Ultimately, the interviews included will no doubt present many further analytical possibilities which, in turn, will be extended further still with the publication of *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections*, from which these materials have been so fortunately omitted.

Biographies

Jason Hughes is Professor of Sociology at the University of Leicester. His research interests span a range of concerns but include: problematised consumption; drugs, addiction and health; emotions, work and identity; figurational sociology and sociological theory; moral panics and regulation. His first book, *Learning to Smoke* (2003, University of Chicago Press) was winner of the 2006 Norbert Elias prize. More recently he has completed, together with Eric Dunning, a major study of the work of Norbert Elias entitled *Norbert Elias and Modern Sociology: Knowledge, Interdependence, Power, Process* (Bloomsbury 2013). He has also recently published a number of edited books, including *Visual Methods* (Sage, 2012) and *Internet Research Methods* (Sage, 2012); and co-edited books, including, together with John Goodwin, *Human Documents and Archival Research* (Sage, forthcoming 2014); together with Chas Critcher, Julian Petley and Amanda Rohloff *Moral Panics in the Contemporary World* (Bloomsbury, 2013), and, together with Nick Jewson and Lorna Unwin, *Communities of Practice: Critical Perspectives* (Routledge, 2007).

John Goodwin is a Reader in Sociology at the University of Leicester. His principal research interests include the sociology of work (especially education to work transitions and gender and work) and the history of sociology. He has expertise in using biographical methods and has used narrative interviews and epistolary analysis in his research on Norbert Elias, Ilya Neustadt and during the restudy of Elias's *Adjustment of Young Workers to Adult Roles* project. John has recently edited two major works for SAGE – *Biographical Methods* and *Secondary Analysis* (both 2012) and he is currently co-editing a further major work for SAGE entitled *Human Documents and Archival Research* with Jason Hughes. John is currently an Associate Editor of the *Journal of Youth Studies*.

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Notes

1. See Elias's acceptance speech, 'Address on Adorno: respect and critique', *Essays III*, Collected Works vol. 16, (Elias 2009b). As can be seen in one of the interviews, Elias remarks that Adorno himself would not have approved of Elias as the first award holder in his name. [↗ \[#N1-pt1\]](#)
2. See Elias's 'Notizen zum Lebenslauf' ('Notes on a lifetime') a revised and annotated translation of which will appear in the forthcoming *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections* volume. [↗ \[#N2-pt1\]](#)
3. In personal correspondence, Eric Dunning has recounted to us the story of Elias's comment to him on the occasion of the fall of the Berlin wall. He said, 'Eric, my dear, I've made another silly mistake. Isn't it wonderful?' [↗ \[#N3-pt1\]](#)
4. As he put it, 'Es gibt Fortschritten, aber kein Fortschritt' (there are progresses, but no 'progress'). [↗ \[#N4-pt1\]](#)
5. Elias expresses his position in this regard most succinctly in the interview with Helmut Hetzel: 'Our traditional conceptual apparatus is not adequate to reality. One cannot speak of progress in general, but of particular instances of progress in certain areas – for example, progress in combating epidemics, in child nutrition, in granting equal status to women and men, in home decor or in transport technology'. [↗ \[#N5-pt1\]](#)