Universally applicable criteria for doing figurational process sociology: Seven balances, one triad

Cas Wouters

Abstract: Until recently, discussion of the criteria relevant to studying civilising processes focused mainly on the balance of controls (that is, between Fremdzwänge and Selbstzwänge). This paper starts by focusing on the 'triad of controls', a concept that Elias presents as one of the 'criteria of social development'. It refers to 'three fundamental controls of people in society – the control of humans over extra-human natural events, the control of people over each other, and the control of each person over him or herself.' This triad has not received the acclaim it deserves, and it is brought to life only in the work of Johan Goudsblom. The paper shows and discusses how Elias himself presented the triad of controls in his work. It differentiates the triad by distinguishing seven different yet interconnected balances – the balances of competition and cooperation, power and control, formalisation and informalisation, the we–I balance, the balance of involvement and detachment, and the lust-balance. They are presented as universally applicable guidelines for analysing social and psychic processes. Together, the triad of control and the seven balances offer a research manual and summarise the theory of civilising processes as a 'workable synthesis'.

Keywords: civilising processes and civilising theory; triad of control; competition and cooperation; power and control; formalisation and informalisation; we–I balance; involvement and detachment; lust-balance.

Introduction

Thus far, discussions on Elias's theory of civilising processes have focused mainly on self-controls. As far as I remember, from about 1970 onward, the theory of civilising processes has been described as 'the theory of increasing self-control', as if 'increasing self-control' was its main criterion, the essence of this theory. Randall Collins called it a single-track theory that 'goes from spontaneous instinctual expression, to external social control, to the internalisation of controls as self-restraint' (Collins, 2009: 431). In our article 'Discussing civilisation and informalisation: criteriology' (2013), Stephen Mennell [1][#N1] and I describe a succession of similar misconceptions, found in reviews and discussions of Elias's theory, and we explain why they are wrong. We claim that this theory has a much wider scope and is not restricted to increasing self-controls or to changing external social controls into self-controls. [2][#N2]

The present paper can be read largely as a concluding extension of our 'Discussing civilisation and informalisation' paper. It starts by focusing on the 'triad of controls', a concept that Elias (2012b: 251–2) presented as one of the 'criteria of social development'. This concept refers to 'three fundamental controls of people in society – the control of humans over extra-human natural events, the control of people over each other, and the control of each person over him or herself' (Elias 2006b: 238). I shall argue that this triad has not received the acclaim it deserves, and that it is brought to life only in the work of Johan Goudsblom who

has used it to structure his research, such as on the domestication of fire and the expanding anthroposphere. Goudsblom thus shows how every period in human history is 'equally relevant to us'. [3][#N3]

In the latter part of this paper, I will differentiate the triad of controls by distinguishing seven different yet interconnected balances – including balances of control that are directly derived from the triad. Together, these balances and the triad can serve as criteria that largely summarise Elias's theory of civilising processes and provide a 'workable synthesis' [4][#N4] for doing process sociology. [5][#N5] In the attempt at differentiation, this paper builds upon earlier work (Wouters 2007, 2012, 2013), in which I have presented a range of universally applicable guidelines for analysing social and psychic [6][#N6] processes and for making historical and international comparisons. [7][#N7]

The triad of basic controls

1. Norbert Elias introduced the concept 'balance of controls' to refer to the balance of external and internal social controls or self-controls. With his concept 'triad of controls', however, Elias widened the scope considerably, by including changes in the control of humans over 'natural' processes. About this first side of the triad, he writes: 'the taming of fire, wild animals and plants for human use, like many other conquests of this kind, were steps in exactly the same direction as the exploitation of mineral oil or atomic energy for human purposes.' They were all 'part of a slow and very gradual change in the relationship of human beings to non-human nature' in which human and animal muscle power were displaced by other sources of energy such as coal, gas, electricity. In turn, and this is the second side of the triad, this change towards a more extensive control over non-human 'natural' forces depended upon a specialisation and coordination of human activities as well as a differentiation and integration of their organisations, bringing about changes in the social control of people over each other. At the same time, and this is the third side of the triad, the expanding and increasingly dense and stable social organisations could only be maintained with the aid of a fairly stable control of short-term affects and instincts, exerted partly by social institutions and partly by the individuals themselves. For however dependent they may always be on others, they have learned from infancy to control themselves to a greater or lesser degree (Elias 2010a: 125–6).

As a concept, the triad of controls is clearly a member of the same family of concepts as 'figuration' and 'interdependency network', it helps to describe changes in constituent features of any particular network of interdependencies or figuration (relations of control, power, dependency, information and orientation), and whether its chains or bonds are expanding or shrinking, thickening and becoming more dense or diluting and thinning out. It draws attention to the three interdependent sides of the triad and to their synthesis in the figuration as a whole.

Elias argues at length that changes in the control of 'nature', in social controls and in self-controls are highly interconnected – they are 'interdependent both in their development and in their functioning at any given stage of development' (2012b: 151), and therefore, the concept of the triad of controls offers a wide scope for studying connections between technological developments, developments in social organisation, and in self-controls (2012b:152). Together, Elias notes:

> Control of nature, social control and self-control form a kind of chain ring; they form a triangle of interconnected functions that can serve as a basic pattern for the observation of human affairs. One side cannot develop without the others; the extent and form of one depend on those of the others; and if one of them collapses, sooner or later the others follow (2010a: 126).

In the reception of his theory, however, both this perspective and these connections were largely obscured, and as Mennell and I demonstrated in our paper 'Discussing civilisation and informalisation: criteriology' (2013), attention often went rather one-sidedly to changes in self-control, while its connections with changes in social controls and in control over 'nature' were overlooked and, if not, usually misunderstood. With regard to the perspective conceptualised as a triad of controls, this may be related to the fact that the concept is absent from Elias's major work, the 1939 publication of *On the Process of Civilisation*, and that its later presentation is scattered and rather general and abstract. The concept and/or idea of a 'triad of controls' appears (at least?) six times, [8] [#N8] first in manuscripts written in the 1940s and 1950s. These manuscripts were not published before 1987, when they appeared as part two in the original German edition of *The Society of Individuals*. What I have rendered above is largely extracted from this book.

In 1961–2, at the time of the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem, Elias wrote 'The breakdown of civilisation', in which he partly refers to the triad: 'In spite of the high control of that level of the universe that we call "nature", even the most advanced societies still have a very low degree of control over themselves as societies' (2005: 315). This unpublished manuscript appeared in 1989, in the first German edition of *Studies on the Germans*.

In the same book, his article 'Terrorism in the Federal Republic of Germany' was published. This was written in the 1970s and 1980s on the problem of how to explain the emergence of the small terrorist groups in those years. Here, Elias again uses ideas of the triad of controls in his explanation of why autocratic regimes have dominated human societies over thousands of years, and what changes in social and personality structure have allowed for the change from autocratic regimes to sustainable multi-party parliamentary regimes:

> Is not the emergence of terrorist groups also an aspect of the long and difficult process in the course of which a society at an earlier level of civilisation (at which the members keep themselves in check out of fear of the strong hand of a king or dictator) works its way up to a level of civilisation at which the members are able to disagree with political opponents and still restrain themselves and submit to the generally accepted rule of the contest almost without external constraint? (2005: 397–404)

In 1969, in the original German edition of *The Court Society*, Elias mentions that 'it may be useful to point out at least in passing some of the criteria of social development that can serve in the future as a basis for comparisons between different stages of development', and then he comes up with the formulation quoted in the introduction to this paper. In addition he mentions a few similar standards:

> The number of routine contacts which people of different classes, ages and sex have at one stage of social development as compared to another. Others are the number, length, density and strength of the chains of interdependence which individual people form with others within a time-space continuum at a certain stage as compared to earlier or later stages. A standard criterion [...] is the central balance of tensions in a society: the number of power centres increases with a growing differentiation of functions; inequality in the distribution of power – without disappearing – is reduced (Elias 2006b: 237–8).

It seems highly probable that this little excursus on 'criteria of social development' was written in the late 1960s as one of many, mostly small additions to the original, much older manuscript.

In 1970, a year after the publication of *The Court Society*, in the German edition of *What is Sociology?*, Elias pointedly presents 'the triad of basic controls' as one of the universal features of society from which its stage of development can be ascertained. Yet, however pointed his presentation was, neither in this book nor in *The Court Society* does Elias elaborate his concept; he seems to content himself with merely emphasising its importance. [9][#N9]

The next reference to the triad is in the 1979 (journal) and 1982 (book) German originals of *The Loneliness of the Dying*, [10][#N10] when Elias discusses changes in dying and in attitudes towards death in connection with changes in human control over the forces of 'nature'. The longing of human beings for immortality, he writes, 'constantly misleads them into according to symbols of immutability, for example "Nature" imagined as unchanging – far higher value than to themselves, to the development of their own life together, and to the changing range and pattern of their control over "Nature", over "society" and over themselves' (2010b: 62–3).

In his essay 'The fisherman in the maelstrom', written in 1980–2, Elias again used the triad of basic controls when describing 'double-bind processes – a higher danger level perpetuating a higher affect- and fantasy-level of knowledge and beliefs, and a low level of danger control, thus maintaining exposure to dangers at a high level.' He explains why double-bind processes must have been 'particularly inescapable' in the life of our early ancestors: 'they were short of knowledge and short of the triad of basic controls – control over natural processes, over social processes and, individually, over the processes of their own selves. Even at later stages double-bind processes can be observed at all three levels.' Elias then proceeds to give examples (2007: 131).

Although the concept is not used in it, Elias's essay 'Technisation and civilisation' (based on a lecture given in 1986), can be read as a long-drawn-out demonstration of interconnections in the triad of controls. It would have fitted superbly, as the following two quotations may illustrate:

> Living together in a relatively pacified area with a comparatively very large number of people in itself demands a relatively high balance, stability and variety of acquired self-regulation. It is the greater diversity, length and variety of the chains of interdependence that run through the social existence of an individual that create these as a matter of course (2008: 61).

And:

> Sociologically most relevant is the fact that technological experiments normally very soon go hand in hand with experiments relating to relevant forms of social organization (2008: 65).

2. From what is written in these scattered places, it becomes clear that the idea of the triad was clearly present from the 1940s and 1950s onwards in manuscripts, although the public could be only aware of this much later. In 1969 and 1970, the concept of the triad was briefly and abstractly mentioned (in *The Court Society* and *What is Sociology?*), leaving most of the more lively treatments unpublished until the 1980s. This poses the question of why Elias would have left important expansions of his theory in manuscripts. And also, a related question, why this came to an end in the 1980s when publications prospered? The answer to the latter question is in the work of Michael Schröter, who became Elias's translator and assistant in 1976, and from 1982 until Elias's death (1990), his editor for sorting out manuscripts, his sorting-editor. Based upon his intimate knowledge of Elias as an author and as a person, Schröter, in *Erfahrungen mit Norbert Elias*, provides an interesting answer to the first question. It is centred on the observation that Elias 'could hardly

muster the detachment needed for making his own work ready for printing. Whenever confronted with a text of his own, he gave in to his imperative wish to write' (1997: 226–8). Schröter characterises Elias's writing as 'a process of uninterrupted, never-ending condensation and enrichment' (1997: 289; also: 235–6; 288–9; 292–5).

In view of his writing process, Elias probably did not see much difference between what was published and what was not. For decades, his concentration was on the point of writing, and thus he expanded his theory without fully taking into account which parts he had already published and which parts were only written in manuscripts. The idea and the concept of the triad of controls had been used at least since the 1940s and 1950s, and although Elias had only summarily dealt with the concept in writing, it had become deeply integrated into his theoretical thinking and had structured his research. It was not, however, integrated explicitly enough in his writing, and consequently the triad of basic controls was not noticed, or scarcely noticed, in the reception of his work – with one important exception.

3. The exception is in the work of Johan Goudsblom, who used and elaborated both the idea and the concept in *Sociology in the Balance* (1977a: 137–43), and in his work on the domestication of fire as a civilising process in the history of humankind, from the 'original' control of wildfires into camp fires up to its present-day control in electricity grids and in batteries as portable 'electrifications' of fire. In the introduction to *Fire and Civilization* (1992), Goudsblom notes that his study is focused mainly on the level of human history at large, for which general perspective Elias's idea of the triad of controls has functioned as guideline. He writes:

> The important point is to see [these interlocking types of control] as interrelated and, together, as subject to change. Equally important is the observation that the triad of controls constitutes, at the same time, a triad of dependencies. [...] As the human capacity to control fire has increased, so has people's inclination to depend upon social arrangements guaranteeing its regular availability and minimizing the hazards it involves (1992: 10).

And on the level of individuals, the control of fire not only demanded that each individual acquire the skills needed to deal with fire, but, more generally, that each comply with the standards of conduct that had developed within these social arrangements.

In his work on 'the expanding anthroposphere' (2002), Goudsblom again structured his research on the 'triad of controls' over extra-human, inter-human, and intra-human processes; these are also indicated as technology, organisation and civilisation. In this work, too, Goudsblom emphasises that each of the three forms of control can only exist and evolve in connection with the other two:

> Technology could not have developed without 'social organisation': the various means by which people are able to exchange information, co-ordinate their activities and take into consideration the intentions and interests of others. Less obvious perhaps, but equally important, is the part played by 'civilisation': the social process in the course of which individuals learn to handle their own drives and emotions. [...] Both technology and social organisation require civilisation; neither can function without it (2002: 27–8).

Goudsblom shows how the control over fire was a basic condition for the subsequent emergence and globalisation of agriculture and industry, and thus for an expanding anthroposphere within the biosphere. His

focus on the triad of controls helps considerably in bringing the entire expanding anthroposphere into view, which is a view of civilising processes at the level of human history at large. On this level, it becomes apparent how, in the course of the same process in which human dependence on the forces of nature has become less direct, dependence on cultural and social resources has increased. For 'technology cannot exist in a social and cultural void: it can only function in a context of social organisation and civilisation' (2002: 374, 403). [11] [#N11]

4. In my own research, I have used the concept 'triad of controls' only in an article on technology (2006a: 182). In general, however, I have mainly concentrated on interconnections between technologies on the one hand and external and internal social controls on the other via the window of changes in the latter. In other words, I have focused less on changes in the social control over 'natural' forces and more on the balance of changes in the social control people exert upon each other in their social relations and organisations on the one hand, and changes in the control they exert upon themselves as self-regulation on the other. My studies have been restricted to the last 150 years of human history, mainly to the rich West, and my most recent research focuses on changes in social codes regulating sexuality, lust, intimacy and love between women and men, girls and boys, parents and children. In view of such current and juicy topics, working with the triad of controls may soon be perceived as highly abstract – as too many bones, not enough flesh and blood. This is because the triad of controls clearly represents a higher level of synthesis than that of the balances. Research structured along the lines of these balances, however, is more likely to yield results that are preparatory in terms of the task of integrating them on that higher level of synthesis.

Seven balances

In this paper, I have tried to formulate most of the standards or criteria mentioned above in the form of universally applicable balances or ratios. Their focus is extended to include changes in orientation and identification. The connections between the three sides of the triad of controls can be studied by focusing on the three inherent balances of control: between each one and the other two. Therefore, three of them can be derived directly from the triad. In doing process sociology, the attempt to steer away from dualisms soon brings balances, ratios, blends or alloys into view. These balances, like most balances in an Eliasian theoretical framework, are conceptual instruments for determining relations, tensions and conflicts between the two or more connected entities, of one or more balances – and on all existing or relevant levels of integration, from the level of individuals and small groups to humanity at large. Unlike the balances we know as seesaws and kitchen weighing scales, they are multipolar tension balances, multileveled and susceptible to change in more than one direction and from one level to other levels.

The list of balances could be easily supplemented, although in most cases these supplements can be included in one of the seven that play a leading part in this article. [12] [#N12] For example, a shift in the carrot-and-stick balance towards more 'carrot' and less 'stick' or, in other words, from degrading towards upgrading certain groups of people, can be understood as increases in identification with these groups, as changes in the balance of mutual trust and distrust. In terms of the seven balances described in this paper, these are shifts in their balance of power and control as well as in their we–I balance, and also in their balance of detachment and involvement. The twentieth-century phase of informalising processes becoming dominant provides another example: the spread of informal manners demanded the development of a more conscious or ego-dominated type of self-regulation on the part of more and more people. With these new demands, prevailing tensions in manners and in self-regulation came to arise predominantly from the balance between conscience and consciousness or, as Hans-Peter Waldhoff (1995) has put it, from the 'superego–ego balance'. In this paper,

these and similar changes in manners and self-regulation are ordered as changes in the balance of external and internal controls, and also as indications of shifts in the balance of power and dependence. For as networks of interdependence expanded and the inherent cooperation and competition intensified, the pressures to develop a higher-level balance between directness *and* tactfulness have continued to rise, making emotion regulation more important as well as more highly appreciated.

These examples also show how heavily interconnected these balances are: a change in one of them can be expected to go hand in hand with changes in the others. However, not all balances are equally relevant to all kinds of studies, if only because some balances are more widely applicable than others. The evolutionary 'survival of the fittest', for example, can be understood as a power struggle, and the evolutionary process of differentiation of functions and their integration on higher levels as resulting in a hierarchy of integration levels. 'The nature of dominance on various levels differs', writes Elias, 'but to gain a picture of the process of the great evolution we cannot entirely do without a concept of this kind, and related ones such as the power struggle and the balance of power' (2007: 221). Other balances such as the lust-balance are only applicable on the level of human beings – that is, on levels of social integration. However, the interconnectedness of these seven balances implies, as a rule of thumb, that as more of them can be, and are drawn into research, the more solid the evidence tends to become.

In what follows, I shall first mention the seven balances, and subsequently, with the help of a wide range of various examples, I shall give an indication of how they have served as guides for doing figurational process sociology. The following balances have structured my research:

1. the balance of competition and cooperation
2. the balance of external social controls and internal ones or self-controls
3. the balance of power
4. the balance of formalisation and informalisation
5. the lust-balance of lust and intimacy or sex and love
6. the we–I balance
7. the balance of involvement and detachment

1) The balance of competition and cooperation can be determined at all levels of social integration; when competitive pressures towards decentralising or centrifugal tendencies were dominant, societal tensions were quite different from those when centripetal tendencies, pressures towards cooperation and integration were dominant. Therefore, at the level of one or more societies up to a global level, this balance opens a window on changes in the size and density of networks of interdependencies (figurations) and thus on their level of differentiation and integration. In recent ages, as cooperation between people and their organisations expanded and became more complex and multi-level, competition tended to become more pacified and subtle as well as more intense. The interweaving of people and their organisations gave rise to more cooperation in competitive relations and more rivalry in cooperative relations. In more developed countries, this balance has become increasingly connected to the balance of work and play: how much play there is in work and how much work in play. Changes in these balances provide indications of changes in the levels of functional and social differentiation and integration, while changes in regulating the inherent tensions and conflicts in these processes open a window on the level of pacification.

In his *On the Process of Civilisation*, Elias focuses on the competitive struggle for land as the main driving force of a monopolisation of the use of physical violence and taxation in state-formation processes. For this

process, he coined his concept 'monopoly mechanism'. Indeed, the European Union and 'human rights' are examples of state-formation processes having proceeded to an international and global level. However, a world-state monopoly still seems far-fetched, and it would be more adequate, therefore, to speak of a 'competition and interweaving mechanism' (see Wouters 1990: 74–5), thus drawing more attention to the continuation of centrifugal and centripetal forces. The working of these forces and this mechanism can be examined by studying changes in the balance of competition and cooperation. Thus, this balance functions as a criterion for perceiving and understanding changes in the length and density of interdependency networks as well as in levels of differentiation, integration, and pacification (see also Wouters and Mennell 2013: 556–60).

2) The second balance is derived most directly and obviously from the triad of basic controls; it is the balance of controls that focuses on changes in the relation between external social controls and internal ones or self-controls (*Fremdzwänge* and *Selbstzwänge*). As competition and cooperation within interdependency networks became more interwoven and power and dependency relations less unequal, external social controls directed at preventing people from becoming involved in forbidden situations and relations, increasingly came to focus on internal ones, that is, on self-controls. This implied a continued anchoring of the requirement to be able to control impulses and emotions, including those considered 'dangerous' for evoking the fear of landing on a slippery slope towards losing social and personal value. In this process, control over this fear was strengthening and the level of mutually expected self-controls or mutual trust was rising. And as internal controls became more all-round, differentiated, subtle, even, and automatic or habitual, the level of mutual suspicion and fear tended to decline.

The decline and disappearance of chaperones is a case in point, for it went hand in hand with the internalisation of their functions: women had to become their own chaperone and men also had to incorporate the chaperone by not bothering women without the presence of such a guardian. They had to distinguish subtly between approaching women more freely and boldly and yet without bothering them and affecting their sense of freedom. As these societal expectations settled, external social control came to be focused increasingly on internal ones or self-controls. External social controls directed at preventing people from becoming involved in forbidden situations and relations, thus blocking possibilities of yielding to temptation, became increasingly exercised on the self-regulation of people who are now expected to prevent these transgressions under their own steam. External social controls changed direction: they became directed at the vigour and flexibility of the inner limitations that people impose on themselves in order not to give in to the temptations of 'dangerous' situations and relations – dangerous, that is, if it meant an unwanted violation of the social code. They did not diminish. On the contrary: the social sanctioning of behaviour showing a flawed control of conscience gained ascendancy.

3) Closely connected to changes in the balances of control, competition and cooperation are changes in the balances of power, in the power and dependency relations between regions, states, social classes, genders and generations. This connection may explain why the twentieth century saw processes of decolonisation and continued decline of imperialism, and, in all Western industrialised countries, a continued emancipation of workers, women, homosexuals, old people and children. The emancipation of women and youth implied that more men were taking the needs and desires of their wives more into account, and that more parents did the same with their daughters and sons. This power gain of young people and women went hand in hand with an emancipation of their sexuality and with a growing taboo on domestic violence. I have examined, for example,

how changes in sexual codes and practices dovetail with changes in power ratios, and how the sexual careers of young girls and boys reflect declining inequalities between the sexes and the generations (Wouters 2012, 2013b).

In his lectures and publications, Elias always showed and emphasised that power and dependency are aspects of all social relations, that all relations are relations of power and interdependence, and embedded in networks or webs of interdependence. All balances of control implied in the triad of controls are largely balances of power and interdependence: the power and dependency of human beings over non-human nature, over each other and their society and over themselves.

To his (and John Scotson's) book *The Established and the Outsiders* (2008), first published in 1965, Elias later added two essays in which he introduced and expanded the concept of established–outsider relations. This concept is part of his established–outsider theory, in which relations of power, status and self-evaluation are placed in the centre of attention. In the book, originally presented as *A Sociological Inquiry into Community Problems* (its subtitle) in a place they called Winston Parva, Elias and Scotson explain differences in power, rank, we-images, and self-evaluation between two communities that consisted of very similar groups – both working class. They answer questions such as why and how one of them succeeds in monopolising power sources and uses them to exclude and stigmatise members of the other group, and how that is reflected in the collective we-images of both groups and experienced in their self-evaluation. In an essay, written for the Dutch translation in 1976, Elias presents the 'Winston Parva model' (Elias and Scotson, 2008: 1–36). As a model it depicts a particular balance of power and control. In a later essay, written for the German translation in 1990, Elias integrated the term model in the title: the Maycomb model (Elias and Scotson 2008: 207–31). This shows that he had again taken up his old plan of presenting a series of established–outsider models, thus developing a general theory of power relations between human groups and showing empirically how the experience and the whole psychic make-up of the people involved are moulded by them. The presentation of both models, the Winston Parva model in particular, is based on constant comparison, implicitly and explicitly, with other established–outsider figurations in different classes and in other eras. On a more general and abstract level, Elias had done exactly this in 1956, in his essay 'Problems of involvement and detachment', when discussing the construction of a theoretical synthesis in a 'model of models' (2007: 92; 184) and in 1970 by presenting his 'game models' in *What is Sociology?* (2012: 66–98). [13] [#N13]

The original book also contains comparisons that connect the study of Winston Parva to the study *On the Process of Civilisation*, for example where the authors write that 'already the second generation of an expanding though still secluded community near an industrial town could throw up its own local "aristocracy"' (p.100), functioning in many respects like a 'good Society', including the use of gossip as an instrument of power. In addition to this implicit comparison with *On the Process of Civilisation,* here is a more explicit one:

> Circles of old families in relation to those over whom they successfully claim status superiority are as a rule more 'civilised' in the factual [meaning: technical] sense of the word: their code demands a higher level of self-restraint in some or in all respects; it prescribes a more firmly regulated behaviour either all round or in specific situations, which is bound up with greater foresight, greater self-restraint, greater refinement of manners and which is studded with more elaborate taboos (Elias 2008: 178; cf. 'Note on the text': xii–xiii) .

In this quotation, Elias refers to his *On the Process of Civilisation* in a note, which shows that the title of this book indeed draws attention to differences and changes in the level of self-restraints. However, this quotation also shows a vibrant though implicit established–outsider theory – the 'circles of old families' as 'the established' and 'those over whom they successfully claim status superiority' as 'the outsiders' – and a focus that clearly is directed at the connection between established–outsider relations and civilising processes, or, in more general terms, between social and psychic processes; and in terms of this paper, between the balance of power and the balance of controls. Both theories and balances clearly complement each other; they are sides of the same coin, parts of the same theory, and [building] material of the triad of basic controls.

4) A fourth criterion consists of changes in the balance of formalisation and informalisation. A swift measure of this balance is the formality–informality *span*: this 'concerns the *synchronic* gradient between formality and informality'. This gradient refers to difference of behaviour in formal and in informal situations and relations or, more precisely, the difference between behaviour in contacts with people of socially higher and lower standing on the one hand, and behaviour with people of relatively equal status on the other.

> Currently, the formality–informality span in many of the more advanced industrial states is relatively small, and among people of the younger generation perhaps smaller than ever before. [...] The tendency – partly unintended, partly intended – is towards the same behaviour in all situations.

This tendency is the *diachronic* aspect of informalisation: the formality–informality *gradient*. 'Its development in a specific direction is an aspect of the process of civilisation' (Elias 2005: 32–5*)*.

Up to the 1880s, in the West, formalisation was dominant; there was a long-term process of formalising manners and disciplining of people. More and more aspects of behaviour were subjected to increasingly strict and detailed regulations that were partly formalised as laws and partly as manners. From the late nineteenth century onwards, informalisation became the dominant trend. The gradual trend towards more pre-marital sex throughout the twentieth century was an important part of the more general process of informalisation, just like the nineteenth century trend towards controlling the place of sex in marriage was part of a more general process of formalisation. In the nineteenth century, increased control of sexual impulses and emotions, part of an overall tightening of self-restraints, was accomplished to a large extent by emphasising its social, psychic and hygienic necessity. Imprinting more rigid and detailed restraints was accomplished, for example, by loudly emphasising the serious dangers of masturbation for morality and health. This fear-mongering was a social context containing pressures towards more rigid and detailed codes of behaviour and feeling. It will have stimulated the rise of rigid second-nature counter-impulses on 'first-nature' sexual impulses.

Informalisation has been a trend towards widening the range of socially accepted behavioural and emotional alternatives, a change from fixed rules to flexible guidelines, depending on the various types of situation and relation. This widening range of socially accepted options went hand in hand with increasingly careful scrutiny of the choices made, triggering not only greater flexibility and reflexivity but also an 'emancipation of emotions', [14] [#N14] which included an emancipation of sexuality, a sexualisation process. Especially since the 1960s, almost the entire spectrum of behavioural and emotional codes has seen a controlled liberalisation, a regulated deregulation. It went further in the Netherlands than in most other Western countries (see Wouters 2007; 2013b).

Continued expansion and intensification of social competition and cooperation implies incitement to ongoing social and psychic emancipation and integration. For looser manners and the whole process of informalisation appear to be associated with a collective emancipation of lower classes in society and with a mental or 'psychic informalisation': the emancipation of 'lower' impulses and emotions in personality. As lower classes were represented in the power centres of society and lower affects in the power centre of the personality – consciousness – there was a corresponding change in the codes for regulating manners and emotions.

As the social and psychic boundaries became more porous, social groups and psychic functions became more integrated, which means that communication and connections between both social groups and psychic functions become more fluid and flexible. Psychic informalisation or 'emancipation of emotions' refers to the growth of psychic openness: when emotions and impulses under the reign of a fairly rigid second nature, emancipate and be admitted to the regulating centre of personality – consciousness, they become directly involved in conscious decision processes. That 'first nature' impulses become less automatically suppressed by second-nature counter-impulses and become more subjected to conscious self-regulation means that connections between 'first nature', second nature and consciousness lose some of their hierarchical order and imperviousness. They become more open and smoother.

I have introduced the concepts of 'third nature' and 'third-nature personality' to draw attention to these changes and to clarify them. The term 'second nature' refers to a self-regulating conscience that functions to a great extent automatically. The term 'third nature' is indicative of a development from this 'second-nature' self-regulation in the direction of a more reflexive and flexible one. It draws attention to the development of a presence of mind or a level of consciousness on which ideally it becomes 'natural' to attune oneself to the pulls and pushes of both 'first' and second nature, as well as the dangers and chances, short-term and long-term, of any particular situation or relation (Wouters 2007).

The long-term process of informalisation could only become dominant after processes of interweaving, of social and psychic differentiation and integration, had reached a critical level. Only from a critical moment in these processes onwards can regimes of manners and emotions allow for informalisation to become dominant. The same happens in the life course of individuals: life necessarily begins with a period in which formalisation is dominant, for children can only learn to play with the rules and practice a 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls' after reaching a critical phase of learning how to regulate themselves. Today, they usually are about eleven, twelve years old before their conscience is sufficiently developed to respond in more conscious, flexible and varied ways to its directives. Lo and behold: the breakthrough of a psychic process of informalisation.

As national, continental, and global integration processes exert pressure towards increasingly differentiated regimes of manners, they also exert pressure towards increasingly reflexive and flexible regimes of self-regulation. The term 'third nature' refers to a level of consciousness and calculation in which all types of constraints and possibilities are taken into account. It is a rise to a new level on 'the spiral staircase of consciousness' (Elias 2010: 95*)*.

5) A fifth criterion concerns changes in the lust-balance, changes in the balance of lust and intimacy, of sex and love, in the social codes regulating sexuality, lust, intimacy and love of the relations between girls and boys, women and men, parents and children. At about the same age as their breakthrough of learning to play with rules, children become sexually mature. In comparison to relatively new physical and/or sexual experiences and desires, their relational ideals and practices are already well developed, as is their whole

pattern of self-regulation. Thus, becoming sexually mature and the development of sexual impulses and longings find a bed – so to speak – in relational developments. How young girls and boys integrate sexuality into their personality and figuration ideals can be recapitulated as the development of their lust-balance, the balance between the longing for sexual gratification and the longing for enduring intimacy. It amounts to their ways of finding an answer to the lust-balance question: when or within what kinds of relationship(s) are what kinds of eroticism and sexuality allowed and desired?

The balance of these longings – in short, the balance between the longing for sex and for love – not only changes in puberty and in the further course of life, but also across generations. All people develop a type of lust-balance that is more or less characteristic of their generation and their sex, reflecting the directing influence of the codes, ideals and practices that were dominant when they grew up. Their parents, grandparents and previous generations had a different spectrum of answers to the lust-balance question, and these intergenerational changes open a window for studying collective lust-balance developments. This means that the ways in which the changes of becoming sexually mature are integrated as lust-balance longings into a previously developed pattern of longings and ideals will not only differ between individuals, but also between social classes, genders, generations, regions, cultures, historical eras. Sexual careers also differ according to phases in lust-balance developments. For example, the Victorian attempt 'to control the place of sex in marriage … by urging the desexualisation of love and the desensualisation of sex' (Seidman 1991: 7) resulted in a lust-dominated sexuality for men and a complementary (romantic) love or relationship-dominated sexuality for women. Since the last decades of the nineteenth century, the traditional lust-balance of a lust-dominated sexuality for men and a complementary (romantic) love- or relationship-dominated sexuality for women has been shifting in the direction of a 'sexualization of love' and an 'eroticization of sex', provoking new and more varied answers to the lust-balance question (Wouters 2004).

My most recent research shows how in the twentieth century, particularly since the 1960s, relations of intimacy and love have become more intense and demanding as inequality between the sexes and generations diminished. The emancipation of women went hand in hand with an emancipation of their sexuality. At the same time, parents – of different social classes to different degrees – have taken more of the interests and feelings of their children into account and also more of the sexuality of their teenagers. In the trend towards intimisation of the relations between women and men, as well as of the relations in which young people are raised and educated, the main vehicle of social control or monitoring has increasingly come to consist of the intimate relation itself. Thus, the emancipation of sexuality coincided with warmer loving relations, increasingly directed at the self-regulation and self-steering of young people, thus bolstering up a more general emancipation of both love and lust (Wouters 2012).

6) Another criterion involves changes in the balance of involvement and detachment. Increasing levels of detachment from affective involvement of fearful and wishful fantasies goes hand in hand with increasing levels of knowledge and control, not only of (non-human) natural processes but also of social and psychic processes. They involve the triad of controls. Norbert Elias used to restrict himself to this aspect of the balance of involvement and detachment, to its meaning in terms of the sociology of knowledge. In addition, this balance can also be used fruitfully as a criterion referring to the strength and affective warmth of relationships on the one hand and on the other hand to the social distance and the psychic detachment maintained. This perspective draws attention to the question how expressions of affective immediacy and involvement compare to those of thoughtfulness, empathy, consideration and reflexivity.

Between parents and children, for example, informalisation went hand in hand with a trend in the direction of relations with greater intimacy and warmth (involvement), combined with greater caution and sensitivity

(detachment). It was a shift from an emphasis on obedience to institutional and adult authority, sanctioned by corporal and other punishments, to an emphasis on qualities linked to the self-regulation of children, sanctioned by reasoning and differentiations in warmth and permissiveness (see Alwin 1988). In their relations, affective warmth as well as reflexive thoughtfulness increased, and this change occurred in most social and psychic relations: they changed towards decreasing social and psychic distance and increasing openness in combination with rising affective and reflexive thoughtfulness.

Whether focusing on human relations or on the level of knowledge and awareness, changes in the balance of involvement and detachment went in the direction of reaching higher levels.

7) The criterion of changes in the we–I balance focuses on the balance between the emotive force of the we-identities of the people under study (the groups people refer to as 'we') and the emotive force of the I-identity of individuals (Elias 2010). It also focuses on the tensions surrounding the emancipation of individuals from the groups they depend on and identify with. The changes usually conceptualised as individualisation imply one or more we-groups from (and in) which people individualise. The first individualisation is known as individuation. It involves the we-group of mother and father. Individuation refers to the beginning of an I-identity, when a young child experiences the budding realisation of being separate, not a symbiotic extension of mother. The identification with parents and/or their representatives is a we-identification that develops as part of any developing we–I balance of individuals. The wider concept of individualisation draws attention to the larger context of we-groups such as families and survival groups that individuals belong to and depend on. The development of these we-identities includes the more or less automatic adoption of their definitions of 'a good life', and of what it takes to pass for 'a man of the world' or 'a woman of the world'. Identification with established groups is in most cases almost automatic, particularly when their superior position is hardly or not contested.

Thus, individuation and individualisation both refer to the development of I-identities amid we-identities. There is no I-identity without a we-identity. There is always a connection, and often also a tension, between the interests of a we-group and those of its single individuals – as well as a tension between the identification of individuals with their we-group(s) and their attempts at gaining greater independence by liberating themselves from the demands of these groups.

From the end of the nineteenth century, when the I-identity of individuals was highly subordinated to their we-identity, there has been a zigzag spiral movement in the direction of emphasising personal identity over group identity. Especially in the 1960s and 1970s, the sense of liberation from the shackles of authoritarian relations was dominant. Expanding group-feeling or widening we-identification to the level of nations somewhat weakened the identification with we-groups such as classes, ethnicities, sex and gender, age, and religion – in the process of social interweaving, the boundaries between the latter faded somewhat as they became the constituting parts of a larger whole. At the same time, this change of the we–I balance in the direction of a *national* 'We' ran in tandem with a growing basis for individualisation – a change in the we–I balance of individuals in the direction of the 'I'. Someone's personal identity was increasingly sought in the individual person, in his or her history, character, body, sexual preference and behaviour. As individuals became less strongly and less directly subordinated to their we-groups, their I-identities could take on a stronger emotive charge. Apparently, the process of social interweaving triggered a widening we-identification and nation formation, as well as providing a basis for individualisation and a rising societal level of mutual trust and, correspondingly, a declining level of anxiety, mutual suspicion and hatred.

Conclusion

The triad of basic controls and the seven balances are taken from, or fit into, Elias's theory of civilising processes and they are universally applicable – which means they can be used in *all* social science. They can all be seen and presented as differentiations, shades or nuances of the triad, putting flesh on a higher level of synthesis and integration. Together, the triad and these balances (and their manifestations as outlined in the examples presented above) offer a search manual of a figurational process theory that permits the bombarding of source materials with questions like: What do the changes observed in research sources mean in terms of these balances, and how does each balance offer its specific contribution to an overall view on changes in broad and multileveled processes? For each balance refers to a part-process that is interconnected with the others. Changes in the balance of controls, for example, cannot be studied separately from changes in the balance of power and dependency, for any exercise of social control is at the same time an exercise in power revealing positions in a web of interdependencies.

It is my experience that a shower of questions implicit in these balances is likely to provide systematic answers to most, if not any, social science research. They will illuminate different yet partly overlapping differentiations of the same social and psychic processes and figuration. And from attempts at integrating these differentiations, the contours of the various levels of a particular triad of controls will emerge.

Biography

Cas Wouters (Utrecht University) has been developing the theory of informalising processes since the early 1970s. Through extensive research on changing manners and emotions in Germany, The Netherlands, Britain and the USA since the 1880s, his theory has become an extension of Elias's theory of civilizing processes. His most recent major books in English are *Sex and Manners: Female Emancipation in the West, 1890–2000* (2004) and *Informalization: Manners and Emotions since 1890* (2007).

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Notes

1. Many thanks to Stephen Mennell for correcting my English and improving my argument in the present article. [#N1-ptr1]

2. Elias did not use just 'increase' or 'decrease' of self-controls as a criterion, we argued, he was always more subtle and differentiated: 'Individuals are compelled to regulate their conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner (Elias 2012a: 406). He referred to more all-round and more automatic self-restraints. 'More all-round' refers to a trend towards social standards of self-restraint applying more uniformly to all situations and relations: social demands for extreme self-control in specific situations becoming increasingly less compatible with an equally extreme readiness to act in accordance with one's impulses in other situations. 'More even' refers to a diminution of extremes, by becoming less volatile and more even-tempered or steady in all types of relations. 'More automatic' refers to the spread of a second-nature type of habitual self-restraints. [#N2-ptr1]

3. At the end of his contribution to a 1929 discussion on why 'the primitive is nowadays increasingly arousing our interest,' Elias said: 'Today we have gradually reached the insight that the human becomes understandable only when it is comprehended in its entirety. That does not precisely mean from its beginnings, for there are no absolute beginnings; but one realises that it is necessary, in order to understand oneself, to go back as far as at all possible [...] If one wishes to understand man, if one wishes to understand oneself – every period in human history is equally relevant to us' (Elias 2006a: 74-5). [#N3-ptr1]

4. The term 'workable synthesis' is first used by Goudsblom for describing how Elias succeeds in overcoming the one-sidedness and the exclusiveness inherent in the different perspectives of social science founding fathers such as Comte, Marx, Weber, Durkheim, Freud, and Simmel, by integrating them into a workable synthesis (1977b: 79). Richard Kilminster also argues that Elias 'managed to integrate 'through empirical research many seemingly incompatible perspectives into ... a single testable model of human interdependence', and he elaborates and expands on this 'workable synthesis' (2007: 14; italics in original). [#N4-ptr1]

5. The terms 'process sociology' and 'figurational sociology' are both common, but the second term is more established. I prefer the first because, probably, the emphasis on change is more urgent. The term 'figurational process sociology' is used here as a synthesising compromise and to provide a 'workable synthesis' for the practice of sociology of this kind. [#N5-ptr1]

6. For an account of using 'psychic', not 'psychological', see Wouters 2006. It should, however, be noted that Elias himself never used the word 'psychic' when writing in English, probably because of the unfortunate connotations the word has acquired in that language. See the editors' remarks in the new scholarly edition of *On the Process of Civilisation* (Dublin: UCD Press, 2012 [Collected Works, vol. 3]: xviii). [#N6-ptr1]

7. Among the balances presented as criteria in an earlier version of this article, the 'triad of controls' was not mentioned. Johan Goudsblom made me aware of this omission. Many thanks Joop! [#N7-ptr1]

8. The earliest publication in which Elias used the term 'triad of basic controls' was in *What is Sociology?* (2012b [orig. 1970]: 151–2). While compiling the Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Stephen Mennell noticed that the *idea* of a 'triad of basic controls', can also be found elsewhere – for instance, in Elias 2006b: 238; 2010b: 62–3; 2007: 131; 2010a: 126; 2005: 315. He therefore inserted cross-references in those volumes to the explicit use of the specific phrase 'triad of basic controls' in W*hat is Sociology?*
   ⬆ [#N8-ptr1]

9. A possible explanation of the absence of elaboration is in the theoretical problems of how to interpret the 1960s overall trend of increasingly lenient and loose social codes of behaviour and feeling. A palatable interpretation only came in the mid-1970s with the concept of 'informalisation' and its thesis that, on the whole, the general trend of informalisation did not imply declining social and personal demands on self-control, to the contrary, these were rising (Wouters 2007: 230-35). Elias accepted and absorbed my view of informalisation in his theory, for example: 'It is easy to find one's way in a landscape where there are only proscriptions and prescriptions; it is far more difficult in a landscape where one has to gain through experience a certain sensitivity for how far one can go in a specific situation and how far one must hold back' (Elias 2005: 407). ⬆ [#N9-ptr1]

10. This essay was the outcome of an initiative from the editors of *werkundzeit*, who had approached Elias for a brainstorm-interview about the topic of their next issue: 'tot' (death) (Schröter 1997: 236).
    ⬆ [#N10-ptr1]

11. Understanding technology as being interdependent with social organisation and 'civilization' goes against the rather dominant view of technical innovations as main causes of social change: the invention of a steam engine as causing the industrial revolution, and the invention of 'the pill' as causing the Sexual Revolution. Present-day interdependence of technological innovation, social organisation and 'civilisation' can be demonstrated, for example, from individuals who do not allow themselves (or their women) to use convenient means of birth control, and from the many groups and countries in which these means are not (yet?) made available, or scarcely so. Moreover, research from a somewhat longer-term perspective shows that the most significant change in sexuality had occurred already in the generations that lived before the 1960s. This research (Van Vliet 1990) shows that in the Netherlands, young people born at the beginning of the twentieth century postponed their first coitus on average until ten years after becoming sexually mature. The generation of about 1935 waited seven years, an average decline of 10 months per 10 years. This downward trend continued: the generation of 1970 waited 5 years, which was a decline of 7 months per 10 years. Apparently, this decline was at a slower pace than that of the generations before World War II. Although 'the pill' did of course allow for more and more varied sexuality and for greater emotional tranquillity in seeking sexual pleasure, these findings nevertheless allow the conclusion that social organisations as well as the morals, manners and self-control of individuals in the Netherlands were so to speak 'ripe' for the arrival of the 'pills' (see Wouters 2006a). ⬆ [#N11-ptr1]

12. When this article was at the final draft stage, Johan Goudsblom suggested one further balance that is important: the balance of dominant and recessive trends. It was too late to incorporate a full discussion here, but the concept is broached in Goudsblom (1996). Recognising that within long-term processes there are often contradictory part-processes – for example simultaneous civilising and decivilising currents – could help to end many pointless debates. ⬆ [#N12-ptr1]

13. I should like to thank Willem Kranendonk for pointing to the game models in this connection.
    ⬆ [#N13-ptr1]

14. In *The Court Society*, Elias draws attention to attempts to emancipate 'feeling' as part of counter-movements within court society, and to how severely the people involved were 'punished by social downfall or at least degradation.' He continues:

It will not be possible to understand Rousseau and his influence, the possibility of his success even within the *monde,* unless he is seen as expressing a reaction to court rationality and to the suppression of 'feeling' in court life. From this angle, too, an exact analysis of the relaxation that took place during the eighteenth century in the *monde* illuminates the structural changes in certain psychological strata, though not in all, that made possible a degree of emancipation of spontaneous emotional impulses, accompanied by a theoretical assertion of the autonomy of 'feeling' (2006b: 122–3).

These attempts at an emancipation of emotions/feelings occurred as an important reaction to the formalisation process in eighteenth-century court society, to court codes becoming more strict and formal. However, at that time this reaction did not become dominant. That occurred around the 1880s, when a relaxation of manners and an emancipation of emotions became part of a dominant process of social and psychic informalisation. ⬆ [#N14-ptr1]