

Informalisation and Evolution: Four Phases in the Development of Steering Codes

Cas Wouters

Volume 6, Issue 1, May 2017

Permalink: <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0006.106> [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0006.106>]

 [<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/>]

Abstract: *This article [1],[#N1] shows how long-term evolutionary and social processes are intertwined by comparing two major transitions in biological and social steering codes, one transition serving as a precondition for the other. The first, and oldest, of these shifts involves the evolutionary transition into dominance from the innate and highly fixed genetic steering codes of all forms of life to the more collectively learned steering codes of relatively small numbers of highly developed species, allowing them more steering versatility. In this evolutionary process, the genetic steering codes of hominoids and, subsequently, modern humans were increasingly transmitted less by biological inheritance of genetic steering codes, such as innate instincts, drives, reflexes and automatic responses linked to survival, and more via the social inheritance of collectively learned social codes. Thus, changes in their steering codes widened the range of steering capacity and options available to humanoids and humans. Eventually, with Homo sapiens, it became genetically possible for social codes to become dominant and determine more and more the survival and life-chances of themselves and other animals.*

In this paper, this transition into dominance is tentatively conceptualised as a shift in the balance of evolutionary formalisation and evolutionary informalisation in favour of the latter – evolutionary formalisation referring to speciation processes and the long-term development in the genetic patterns and steering codes of species, and evolutionary informalisation to the process in which some steering codes of some forms of life lost relative rigidity and gained greater plasticity, allowing for expanding possibilities and options to adjust more flexibly to changing conditions of life. From an evolutionary survival perspective on steering codes, evolutionary informalisation entailed the possibility as well as the necessity for social steering codes to expand. Biological and sociological processes became intertwined to the extent that the biological process of the evolutionary informalisation of steering codes proceeded hand in hand with the sociological process of a formalisation of collectively learned social steering codes, subjecting more and more aspects of behaviour to increasingly strict and detailed social regulations such as traditions, customs, habits, manners and laws. The changing balance of evolutionary formalisation and informalisation in the direction of the latter entails transitions in genetic codes, natural selection, and random mutation through which vertebrates, mammals, hominoids and then modern humans acquired the plasticity and flexibility, empowering the latter to learn languages and symbols. This was an ‘evolutionary breakthrough’ to higher levels of biological, social and psychic integration, enabling regimes of manners and emotions that facilitated and obliged humans to learn an increasingly large repertoire of behaviour and to transmit increasingly complex learned knowledge in ‘love-and-learn processes’. [2],[#N2]

In this long-term process, at increasing levels of differentiation, integration, expansion and complexity, the balance of formalisation and informalisation of social codes was dominated by a formalisation of these codes until the second half of the nineteenth century, when the second, more recent transition in dominance from formalisation to informalisation occurred. From this moment on the long-term process of formalisation of social steering codes was followed in dominance by an ongoing process of informalisation, changing rather fixed socially learned codes in the direction of flexible guidelines. Many social codes lost rigidity and gained plasticity, allowing for expanding possibilities and options to adjust more flexibly to

changing conditions of life, while simultaneously compelling psychic processes to be more versatile and more strongly dominated by consciousness.

In this article, I describe and compare evolutionary and social processes by comparing the two subsequent transitions in dominant steering codes from formalisation to informalisation. Since these terms originated from the study of social processes, this comparison will also serve as a test of their applicability to evolutionary processes.

Signposts

The project of comparing these transitions emerged from my ongoing research into changes in regimes of manners and emotions since the 1870s. Norbert Elias studied, described and interpreted four centuries of the long-term phase of formalisation in socially learned steering codes as a civilising process (2012a). I have studied the subsequent phase of informalisation in a global perspective, but particularly in Europe and the USA (Wouters 2004, 2007). This research strengthened my ever-growing conviction that the importance of this social and psychic transformation in dominance from formalisation to informalisation is underestimated. My desire to raise its profile resulted in a quest to find and clarify another transformation that carries similar weight and apparently shares similar dynamics. This brought me to the project of comparing two sequential phases in the balance of formalisation and informalisation: first, in the development of innate steering codes, integrating the theory of natural selection and the gene theory of inheritance, and second in the development of collectively learned social codes, integrating the theory of social and psychic civilising processes. This project therefore encompasses a period of time that spans the beginning of life on earth to the present day. My main focus, however, will be the transition in dominance from one phase to the other.

The concepts and the processes of social formalisation and informalisation are still not well-known. Certainly in the context of the history of life on earth, but also in relation to the history of humanity, awareness of these two phases is confined to relatively small circles. In various walks of life, part-processes of formalisation and informalisation have not been identified as such, nor has it been recognised that they together constitute a much more broadly, encompassing long-term process that represents a breakthrough in human history. [3] Therefore, before setting out on my attempt at comparing the two transitions into dominance from formalisation to informalisation, further explication of the transition in social steering codes is necessary. This is done from several angles and in a number of sections that follow.

The transition into dominance from formalisation to informalisation in the wealthier countries of the West is expounded in a general sketch, illustrated by some examples. Three short-term phases within a long-term phase of informalisation are distinguished here: (1) the *Fin de Siècle*, (2) the Roaring Twenties and (3) the Expressive Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. In various ways, each short-term phase involved broader layers of the population, and each was followed by a phase of 're-formalisation' in which many earlier informalised social codes were integrated into the prevailing code and were thus formalised (Wouters 1986). The overall direction of these changes in the balance of formalisation and informalisation in favour of the latter is indicated by longer-term developments such as diminishing social and psychic distance, continued 'emancipation of emotions' and the rise of a 'third nature' type of personality. The discovery of the wide scope and radius of the long-term process of dominant informalisation led to the view of the civilising process as comprising two successive long-term phases – formalisation and informalisation. Later in the article, I present examples of why informalisation demands a critical degree of formalisation that precedes it, together with the development of a habitus that incorporates a critical level of taken-for-granted social and self-controls, before a viable degree of informalisation can proceed. Seen from all these angles, significant process

drivers of informalisation suggest themselves: (1) interconnected changes in (rising) levels of co-operation and competition, (2) social differentiation and integration, and (3) continued functional democratisation [4] [5] in expanding networks of interdependency.

Western social codes in phases from formalisation to informalisation

Although not much is known about the early stages of human history, it seems possible to capture the changes over the course of these thousands of years as a long-term process of formalisation. This generalisation can be backed up by referencing the expansion of the triad of human controls: over nature (technology), over each other via the social controls of organisation, and over themselves via increasingly demanding socially inherited traditions, habits, manners and other regimes of behaviour and emotions (Elias 2012b: 151–2; cf. Wouters 2014). This very long-term expansion of controls went hand in hand with social steering codes becoming more extensive, more rigid, fixed and detailed, signalling how people came to demand a more and more elaborate discipline from each other. It was a globally dominant process of formalisation of steering codes, involving growing numbers of people and groups in processes of competition and cooperation that fuelled ongoing differentiation and integration of social functions in expanding networks of interdependency.

Norbert Elias' study *On the Process of Civilisation* (2012a) is based upon various series of examples that can be seen as representations of a long-term phase of formalising manners and disciplining people. Elias shows how, from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century in secular upper classes of dominant parts of Europe, 'dangerous' emotions such as those related to physical force (including sexual violence) came to be avoided, repressed and denied in increasingly automatic ways, becoming increasingly regulated by the inner fears of a rather rigid and authoritarian conscience. With multiple series of examples, Elias shows how, driven by the disciplinary forces of expanding interdependency networks, particularly state formation and market expansion, a 'second-nature' steering code, that is, a conscience-dominated type of personality, emerged and became dominant: 'commands and prohibitions become increasingly a part of the self, a strictly regulated superego' (Elias 2012a: 183). This process accelerated in the period in which bourgeois classes entered and came to dominate the centres of power and their 'good society'. In the nineteenth century, social constraints towards self-restraints continued to rise, particularly via an expanding entrepreneurial and professional bourgeoisie and an expanding market.

The rise of this 'second nature' type of discipline and self-regulation was also a process of psychic formalisation: the formation of a habitus or 'inner compass' (Riesman et al. 1950) of relatively fixed/rigid habits and reflexes, captured in expressions such as *stiff upper lip* and – later – *tight-ass*. Parallel to the development of this type of personality and its characteristic steering code was the rising fear of the *slippery slope*, the fear that without rigorous discipline even the slightest lack of control would irrevocably lead to loss of face and an end in the gutter. This fear of the slippery slope is typical of rather authoritarian relations and social controls, as well as a relatively authoritarian and automatically functioning conscience. Inclinations towards dissoluteness were feared to the extent that people believed they ought to be nipped in the bud, particularly in children, because without such rigorous control, their 'first nature' might run wild. [5] [6] In raising children, therefore, rule number one was enforcing their obedience.

In the last two or three decades of the nineteenth century, the phase of formalising manners and disciplining people changed in the direction of less fixed and less rigid social codes, allowing for more varied, flexible, colourful, and expressive behaviour; a process of informalisation became dominant. [6] [7] The following

three examples describe the social codes involved in informalisation processes, illuminating the contours of their preceding long-term process of formalisation.

The *first example* is about the wearing of corsets, a practice spread from Spanish aristocratic women in the sixteenth century to other strata and other countries, and which flourished in the nineteenth century. The spread of the corset symbolises the spread of increasing control over the body – loose clothes came to indicate loose morals. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, for instance in the movement for the reform of clothing, ideals of naturalness combined with ideals of beauty. From then on, until the 1960s, the boned corset came to be used only as an orthopaedic gadget for female bodies gone out of control, ones that burst the boundaries of the prevailing standard of beauty. This standard increasingly contained ideals of naturalness, but not without control: much female flesh that was not quantitatively excessive remained controlled by corset-like underwear, girdles, straps, corselets, and bras. Only at the end of the 1960s did women succeed in liberating their bodies from this kind of control. However, it was not a full-blown liberation. It was clearly an example of controlled decontrolling, in which the control of the corset over the body was continued as self-control: women turned heavily to diets, sports, aerobics, fitness, home trainers, and other forms of ‘working the body’ such as plastic surgery (Steele 2001). An illustration of the same process is in the transition from the ‘hard look’ bra that was still common in the 1950s and early 1960s, to the ‘soft look’ bra, introduced in the 1970s, when some women had given up wearing bras altogether. The corset and the hard-look bra symbolise the dominance of a rigid second-nature type of control over ‘first nature’, while the soft look bra and not wearing a corset (or bra) symbolise the ideal of reaching back to ‘natural’ beauty.

The *second example* is the relationship between the dying and those who continue to live. Here, the traditional formal steering code that dying patients were to be kept under the illusion that there was a fair chance of recovery – doctors conducting a regime of silence and sacred lies, hardly ever informing the dying of their terminal condition – changed to the expectation, and for doctors even the judicial obligation, to be open and inform them of the reality of their situation (Wouters 2002).

Thirdly, the practices and ideals of divorced couples have also taken a 180 degree turn: the traditional expectation that they would stop seeing each other is gradually being replaced by the expectation of having a ‘good after-marriage’: the ex-couple maintain a friendship, or work towards being on friendly terms again, particularly if they are responsible for raising children (Veeninga 2008).

The last two examples also show a striking change in the expression of feelings, indicating that it has become quite common to admit dangerous feelings such as lust or hatred, anger or envy, and yet not act upon them. The shift in the long-term Western process of formalisation into a relatively short-term but enduring phase of informalisation of manners saw an ‘emancipation of emotions’: emotions that had been denied and repressed, regained [7].[#N7].access to consciousness and wider acceptance in social codes. On the relational, social level, this involved the informalisation of social codes such as manners and laws, while on the psychic level it involved an informalisation in patterns of emotion regulation. Informalisation processes have continued into the twenty-first century: social constraints towards being unconstrained, and yet reflective, flexible, and alert, keep rising. Yet it is only since the Expressive Revolution (1965–1975) that standards of self-control have increasingly enabled people to admit to themselves and others that they have ‘dangerous’ emotions without provoking shame, particularly the shame-fear of having to give in, of losing control and losing face. Openness about emotions has been growing ever since, together with a keen interest in their regulation.

Two implications of introducing informalisation as a theory and as a process

I first became involved in the study of these changes back in the 1960s, when Amsterdam was still a self-declared 'magical centre' in which a wave of informalisation was rising up against traditionally established relationships. At the Sociological Institute, colleagues often discussed the changes in manners and morals occurring at the time with reference to Norbert Elias's *The Civilising Process*. For many, including myself, a key question emerged: 'Has the civilising process changed direction?', a question for which I provided an answer in an article published in 1976.

Until then, Norbert Elias's own answer to the same question had remained somewhat unclear, even ambivalent (see the next section for details). So I set out to find a theoretical solution by developing the concepts of 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls' and 'informalisation' of manners. These concepts helped to acknowledge the relaxation and liberation of social codes as well as the burden of this liberation: how, since the late nineteenth century, more lenient and looser steering codes of behaviour and feeling have gone hand in hand with rising pressure of social controls on self-controls. They implied a 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls', an 'emancipation of emotions' or 'psychic informalisation', and they involved an *increase* rather than a decrease in the demands on individual steering capacities (cf. Wouters 2007: 230, 241; and Waldhoff 2014 for a recent appreciation and application of the concept 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls').

Elaborating upon this interpretation, I soon realised it had two important implications. The first arose from closer inspection of the period in which the informalising process had been dominant. It soon led me to identify three short-term phases or spurts within the wider long-term phase: (1) the *Fin de Siècle*, (2) the Roaring Twenties and (3) the Expressive Revolution of the 1960s and 1970s. Each spurt involved broader layers of the population, first mainly among the upper classes with old and new money, then in the 1920s among the middle classes, and from the 1960s onward encompassing an increasingly larger majority of whole populations. These waves of informalisation appeared to coincide with changes in the balances of power between the classes within countries, and in the period after World War II, also between colonising and colonised countries. They also seemed to go hand in hand with rising levels of knowledge and consciousness. An intense – though rather concealed – competition in knowledge, including self-knowledge, gave rise to the necessity to be more reflexive and flexible. These waves were experienced and expressed in virtually all walks of life, in spheres of work and of love; for example in more open and playful codes of manners and feelings regulating relations between women and men in courting, sex, love and marriage (Wouters 2004) as well as in relations between the classes, ages and ranks in the worlds of politics, business, industry, education, religion, friendship, body and health care, dying, mourning, and many more (Wouters 2007). They can also be seen in the realms of imagination and the arts, in new styles/forms of literature, architecture, painting, movies and music, in styles such as art nouveau/*Jugendstil*, impressionism and expressionism.

My analysis of informalising processes developed into a research project that aimed to find, compare and interpret changes in American, Dutch, English and German manners books published since the 1880s. The project generated two books, *Sex and Manners* (2004) and *Informalisation* (2007). Among the general trends they cover were a declining social and psychic distance between social classes, sexes and generations; a mixing of codes and ideals; increasing interdependencies; an informalisation of manners; expanding mutual identifications; an 'emancipation of emotions' and rising demands on emotion regulation. On the whole, expressions of superiority and inferiority were increasingly tabooed – except in the realms of imagination such as literature and film and to some extent also in sports – and rather fixed rules of manners turned into

flexible guidelines to be applied according to the specific characteristics of situations and relations, interpreted as the rise of a third-nature type of self-regulation.

All these changes are closely related. They seem to be part of an increasing social (national and international) integration process occurring all over the industrialised world, although of course in varying degrees.

Stronger taboos on expressions of superiority and inferiority – do not shout at people, boss them around, and do not take liberties with subordinates – together with stronger ideals of equality emerged from processes of decolonisation and the emancipation of groups such as the working classes, women, children, young people and homosexuals. For example the emancipation of women went hand in hand with an emancipation of their sexuality (but not only theirs) and also with more intense and demanding relations of intimacy and love. And at the same time, parents of different social classes to varying degrees have taken more of the interests and feelings of their children, and the sexuality of their teenagers, into account. Thus, the emancipation of sexuality coincided with warmer loving relations, bolstering up a more general emancipation of emotions, including both love and lust (Wouters 2016a).

The traditional steering of behaviour and emotions via expansion and specification of social codes changed direction: prescriptions and prohibitions increasingly developed in the direction of guidelines and directives, the application of which depended on their particular relational context. This trend implied an *increase* of behavioural and emotional options. At the same time, social steering codes also became more strict regarding the expression of feelings of superiority and inferiority and more demanding as these changes exerted pressure in the direction of a more alert, flexible and sensitive social navigation towards widening circles of identification and rising levels of empathy, growing social and psychic knowledge, and a more reflexive and flexible self-regulation. There is evidence of a 'third nature' type of personality emerging to the extent that it has become 'natural' to perceive the pulls and pushes of both 'first nature' and 'second nature', as well as both the short-term and long-term dangers and opportunities of any relationship or situation.

The development of such a third-nature habitus involves an attempt to reach back to 'first nature' without losing any of the control that was provided by 'second nature', the self-regulating conscience that functions to a large extent automatically. Thus, the rise of a 'third-nature personality' demands and depends on an emancipation of 'first nature' as well as 'second nature'. The disuse of the corset may serve as a didactic example of 'bringing the body back in' and of reaching back to 'first nature' by domesticating the naked body, clearly demonstrating the impossibility of ever getting to know and experience 'first nature'. [8][#N8]. Since the 1980s, a stylised visible corset has reappeared as a playfully provocative form of erotic display, but as it is taken for granted that the women who wear one do not need such a corset for controlling their bodies, the visible corset can also be taken as a symbol of how ideals of beauty, naturalness, and self-control have merged with each other – another indication of the spread of a third-nature personality. However, in developing this type of personality, people will most probably continue attempts to achieve 'authenticity', the ideal of a perfect balance of first, second and third nature.

The second implication of the discovery of a long-term process of informalisation was that the civilising process had now come to comprise of two long-term phases: first, a long-term process of formalisation that lost its dominance somewhere in the middle of the second half of the nineteenth century, and a second phase involving a shorter, but still long-term process in which informalisation became dominant. Elias's research had not fully covered the latter part of this long-term phase characterised by informalisation. In fact he had made only an occasional reference to it with one or two quotations from the nineteenth century and some sparse remarks on the twentieth. In the following excursus, the theory of informalisation processes is compared with Norbert Elias's theory of civilising processes and his response to both the theory and process of informalisation.

Excursus: Norbert Elias and Informalisation

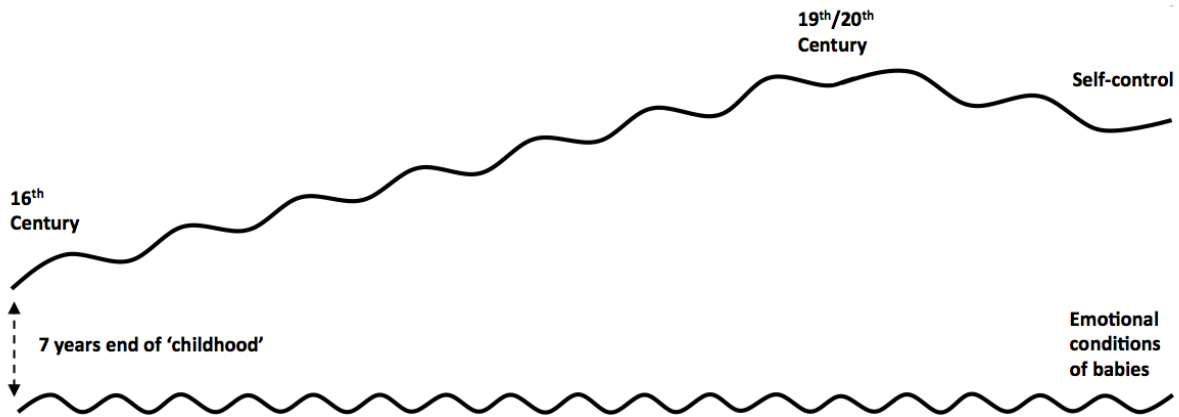
Until Elias read my rough translation of the Dutch version of ‘Has the civilising process changed direction?’ (Wouters 1976), he remained ambivalent about the changes captured in the concept of informalisation. On the one hand, he stuck to the interpretation of similar changes in the 1920s that he had briefly presented in *On the Process of Civilisation* in 1939. In this discussion he admits:

Many things forbidden earlier are now permitted. And, seen at close quarters, the movement seems to be proceeding in the direction opposite to that shown here; it seems to lead to a relaxation of the constraints imposed on individuals by social life (2012a: 182).

‘Many things forbidden earlier are now permitted’ mirrors ‘Thingis somtime alowed is now reпреuid’ (‘Many things permitted earlier are now forbidden’), a sentence from Caxton’s *Book of Curtesy*, one of Elias’s sources from the late fifteenth century. Elias had used this sentence to describe the direction of the whole movement of change, he wrote: ‘This sounds, indeed, like a motto for the whole movement that is now coming: “Thingis somtime alowed is now reпреuid”’ (Elias 2012a: 89; see Wouters 1976: 354). However, the quotation on changes in the 1920s continues with Elias dissociating himself from this perspective: ‘But on closer examination it is not difficult to perceive that this is merely a *very slight recession* [my italics], one of the fluctuations that constantly arise from the complexity of the historical movement within each phase of the total process.’ Even the opening sentence to this section (‘The process of civilisation does not follow a straight line’) is probably meant to serve as a prelude to his argument that the relaxation of constraints was limited and temporary, that he perceives ‘precursors of a shift towards the cultivation of new and stricter constraints’ in recent ‘attempts to establish a social regulation and management of the emotions far stronger and more conscious than the standard prevalent hitherto.’ Elias obviously expected the continuation of the civilising process as he had described it: social codes becoming increasingly forbidding, prescribing, and demanding – a long-term rise in the level of social constraints towards self-constraints (Elias 2012a [1939]: 181–82).

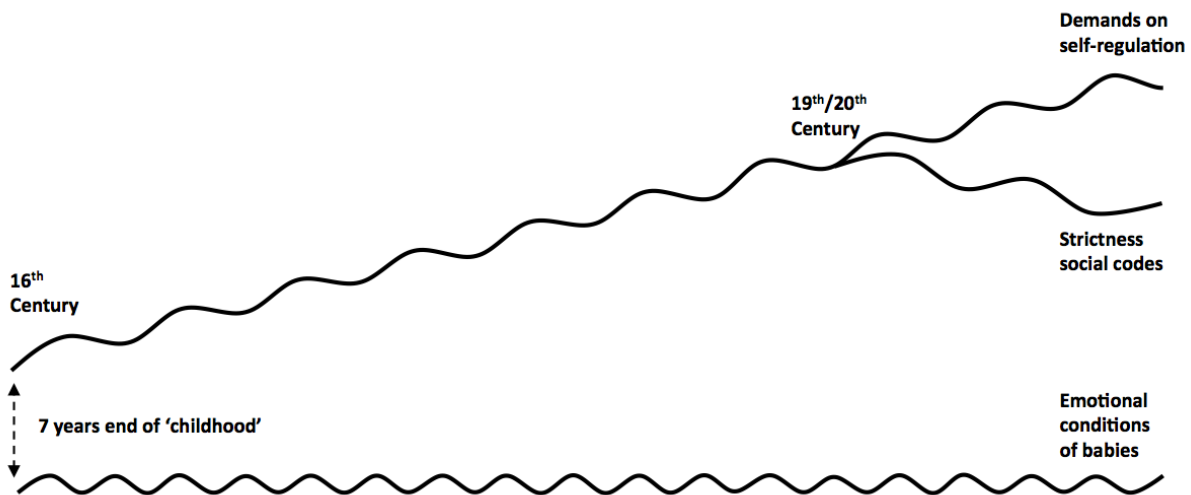
In 1939, Elias included bathing manners of the 1920s as being ‘limited and temporary’. However, by 1974, the trend allowing people to show more of the naked human body had clearly continued, but Elias remained ambivalent. When asked ‘What do you think of the return to nudity?’ he answered: ‘It is obviously a sign of the growth of female power: a woman who can show her legs and breasts is no longer the property of her father or husband. It is a decisive step. Is it truly a liberation?’ This question is used to demonstrate a detached reservation in his answer: ‘Let’s say that the question remains open’ (Elias 2013b [1974]: 176).

A few years before this interview, in 1970 or 1971, when Elias became a regular visitor to Amsterdam, he showed the other side of his ambivalence in a drawing made on a university blackboard and presented as a ‘didactic aid’:



[\[/h/humfig/images/11217607.0006.106-00000001.png\]](#)

This drawing depicts the relaxation of manners as a decline in self-controls. In using it, Elias unwittingly helped me to formulate a correction to his drawing and to develop the theory of informalisation, for it was the strictness of social codes that was declining, not self-control. In fact, demands on self-regulation were rising:



[\[/h/humfig/images/11217607.0006.106-00000002.png\]](#)

Elias soon adopted the concept 'informalisation', first by helping me to write an English version (Wouters 1977) of my original Dutch article (Wouters 1976), and later by crediting me for introducing the concept, as for example in 'The civilising of parents' (2008a [1980]: 35–6), in *The Loneliness of the Dying* (2010 [1979]) and *Studies on the Germans* has an opening chapter 'Civilisation and informalisation', written in 1978 as a lecture (Elias 2005).

Even though I believe I heard this term from Elias in one of his lectures, he only partly adopted 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls'. He used to restrict his discussion of this expression to spectator sports, as in 1976 in a letter to me:

If players cannot loosen their aggressive impulses sufficiently the game will be boring; if they decontrol too much they break the rules of the game which set very firm limits to their aggressiveness. The same goes for the spectators (Elias in Wouters 2007: 231).

This restricted use, only in relation to spectator sports, is also found in his new 1986 introduction to *Quest for Excitement*, in which he writes that a central problem of many sports is how to reconcile ‘the pleasurable decontrolling of human feelings, the full evocation of an enjoyable excitement’ with ‘the maintenance of a set of checks to keep the pleasantly de-controlled emotions under control’ (Elias 2008 [1986]: 31). [9].[#N9]

His 1978 essay ‘Civilisation and informalisation’ renders four types of constraints on the plane of whole societies, without discussing anything like ‘controlled decontrolling of emotional controls’. Elias’s discussion heavily emphasises the burden of liberation, the difficulties of more severe constraints on young people increasingly being made individually responsible for doing the right thing. His example is the emancipation from the external social constraints of fixed courtship rituals. A perspective on the pleasures of informalisation and ‘controlled decontrolling’ is almost absent, and as he did in the 1930s when suggesting the presence of ‘precursors of a shift towards the cultivation of new and stricter constraints’, now – about forty years later – he suggests ‘the beginnings of the formation of new codes of behaviour, even the beginnings of a form of group control’, although ‘the main burden of shaping life together at any rate now lies on the shoulders of the individuals concerned’ (Elias 2013a [1978]: 40–42). [10].[#N10]

In a written text for a lecture in Bremen in 1980, Elias writes about informalisation without using the concept itself. Nevertheless, he demonstrates a long-term perspective on the process of informalisation. The issue is the multi-party parliamentary regime placing high value on things that are slowly changing the German military tradition of absolute obedience and aversion to compromise. ‘There is now the search for the middle way, for mediation and compromise’, he writes, and continues:

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. The strategies of compromise, of tact in putting out feelers as to where one can press forward and where one has to retreat, which are the elementary forms of life under parliamentarism, are certainly still quite some way from gaining a high place in the German scale of values. For that probably a few centuries of growing accustomed to them are required (2013a [1980]: 407).

This process of ‘a few centuries of growing accustomed’ clearly points to a long-term process of habitus formation as it may evolve in a long-term process of informalisation. Within such a process, Elias only draws attention to the rising social demands on self-regulation. In an earlier section of this 1980 text, he restricts informalisation to the younger generation and its ‘deliberate neglect, perhaps even a certain contempt, for the subtleties of form – for instance in the precise gradation of bows and curtsies – especially in so far as these formalities seem to symbolise differences of power, rank and prestige.’ Here, Elias places a note: ‘The development of this stance has been called “informalisation”’ (2013a [1980]: 391). By calling informalisation a ‘stance’ he takes a further distance.

In ‘The Civilising of Parents’, Elias points to ‘waves of informalisation’ and hastens to add that ‘they take place in highly complex societies which demand a very precise regulation of people in their relations with each other in many areas’ (2008a [1980]: 35). He seems fully content to emphasise the ‘very high standard’ of social demands on self-regulation, a similar formulation to forty years earlier when he commented on the

bathing manners of the 1920s: 'But this change, and with it the whole spread of sports for men and women, presupposes a very high standard of drive control. ... It is a relaxation that remains within the framework of a particular "civilised" standard of behaviour' (2012a [1939]: 181). This shows Elias to be persistent in his neglect of the connection between social informalisation and psychic informalisation. That is, he did not recognise how the widening spectrum of socially allowed behavioural and emotional options went hand in hand with a 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls', an 'emancipation of emotions' from a relatively blind and strictly regulated superego. As regulations of superego or conscience become less blind or automatic and strict, and become more open to consciousness and conscious decisions, this shift implies a conversion of conscience to consciousness. Elias did not address this side of informalisation.

Only once in Elias's complete works do we find the expression 'emancipation of feelings'. It appears in *The Court Society*, although its index does not reference it. This index was compiled by Elias himself, and Joop Goudsblom remembers how he had taken this task seriously, from which he concludes that Elias probably did not think this expression was important enough to include. This seems to be as telling as the fact that his single use of the term 'emancipation of feelings' is in the context of failed attempts at an emancipation of emotions. The people involved had reacted to eighteenth-century court codes becoming more formal and strict, but they were severely 'punished by social downfall or at least degradation' (2006 [1969]: 122–3). They failed, so these counter-movements *were* restricted and temporary. Formalisation processes prevailed, and did so until about the 1880s, when a relaxation of manners and an emancipation of emotions became part of dominant processes of social and psychic informalisation.

Elias used the expression 'emancipation of feelings' never again, only in 1969. He used the concept of 'controlled decontrolling of emotional controls' only a couple of times, quite memorably in 'Civilisation and psychosomatics' where he describes what happened in Amsterdam in 1988 after the Dutch football team 'rose to the top of the hierarchy by beating first its German and then its Russian competitor' (2009b [1988]: 185–86). However, Elias always used the concept in its restricted connotation, that is, restricted to the pleasurable excitement of (spectator) sports. He never used it for the psychic informalisation that corresponds to and coincides with the informalisation of social standards in societies as a whole. In addition, his use of the concept and theory of informalisation was largely restricted to one aspect, to underline that demands on self-regulation had not diminished – on the contrary, they had increased. Therefore, Elias did not acknowledge, and probably did not recognise, the importance of social steering codes losing strictness and rigidity while the spectrum of behavioural and emotional options widened, nor did he acknowledge that the civilising process had come to consist of two phases, the long-term phases of formalisation and informalisation, of which he had described only one part (cf. Kilminster 2007: 125–130).

As manners and relations between social groups became less rigid and hierarchical, so too did the relations between psychic functions such as drives, emotions, conscience, and consciousness, altogether opening up a larger and more differentiated spectrum of alternatives, and more flowing and flexible connections between social groups and psychic functions. In the course of this informalising process, to paraphrase and contradict Elias, 'consciousness' becomes *more* permeable by drives, and drives become *more* permeable by 'consciousness'. In informalising societies, elementary impulses again have easier access to people's reflections (Wouters 2007). At the time of writing his book on the process of civilisation, Elias was not able to perceive this and several other characteristics of informalisation. This led him to attribute characteristics of the long-term formalising phase to the entire civilising process:

What is decisive for a human being as he or she appears before us is neither the 'id' alone, nor the 'ego' or 'superego' alone, but always the *relationship* between various sets of psychic functions, partly conflicting and partly co-operating levels in self-steering. It is these

relationships *within* individual people between the drives and affects that are controlled and the socially instilled agencies that control them, whose structure changes in the course of a civilising process, in accordance with the changing structure of the relationships *between* individual human beings, in society at large. In the course of this process, to put it briefly and all too simply, ‘consciousness’ becomes less permeable by drives, and drives become less permeable by ‘consciousness’. In simpler societies elementary impulses, however transformed, have an easier access to people’s reflections. In the course of a civilising process the compartmentalisation of these self-steering functions, though in no way absolute, becomes more pronounced. (2012a [1939]: 452)

In the long-term phase of informalising, however, the latter process was reversed: this compartmentalisation diminished. Social emancipation and integration demanded psychic emancipation and integration, a more strongly ego- or I-dominated self-steering. This kind of self-regulation implies that drives, impulses, and emotions have become more easily accessible, while their control is less strongly based upon an authoritative conscience, functioning more or less automatically as a ‘second nature’ (Wouters 2007: 202). To conclude, Elias only partially accepted and integrated informalisation in his theory, thus demarcating a significant theoretical difference concerning the direction of civilising processes. Although confronted with the theory of social and psychic informalisation, Elias found ways to stick to his original interpretation as formulated in part four of *On the Process of Civilisation*: ‘Overview: towards a theory of civilising processes’, and in section five, ‘The muting of drives: psychologisation and rationalisation’.

Informalisation and the transformation known as the Renaissance

When searching for another transformation of a similar magnitude that would lend itself for comparison to the phase of informalisation of social steering codes under discussion here, the Renaissance first came to mind. I thought it would not be difficult to show how this was also an overall transformation in social and psychic processes over a long lasting period (*longue durée*), involving major shifts in power balances in the direction of court- and state-controlled establishments (Elias 2009a: 107), coinciding with broad waves of individualisation, rising levels of reflection, detachment and consciousness, and with widening circles of identification. These waves first spread in established groups at courts and circles connected to them, and from there to broader and broader social classes.

The metaphor of a spiral staircase has been used by Elias not only to describe the advance of self-detachment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but also for comparing them with the present. People ascend from one floor of a tower to the next from where they could overlook the countryside from a higher perspective, as well as look down and, as it were, observe themselves on the lower level from which they had ascended, but they had not yet climbed high enough to observe themselves as people observing themselves. Elias winds up this comparison by stating: ‘This is the further climb that we are making at present’ (2006: 263). It is ‘the ascent to the next level of consciousness – on which [...] one comes to understand oneself in one’s armour and the nature of this armour as it has come into being on the preceding level’ (2006: 268). A comparison of both transitions, the Renaissance and the present one of informalisation, would show the extent to which the examples I have presented of the transition from a second-nature type to a third-nature type of personality are also examples of this ‘further climb’.

Elias also set an example of looking down to a lower level of the spiral staircase by identifying the nature of this armour in his descriptions of the pervasive *Homo clausus* image of human beings. He wanted to make others see that, as this armour of detachment was thickening, it was reified and 'interposed between affective impulses and the objects at which they are directed, in the form of ingrained self-control'. From the Renaissance onward, he writes, people 'reify the constraint on the affects, the detachment of emotions ... as an actually existing wall between them and the object of their thought', creating an uncertainty over the nature of 'reality' outside, which 'led Descartes to the conclusion that the only certainty was thought itself' (2006: 269–271). Elias clearly derived his own certainty through experiencing this 'further climb' himself.

The major advance in the development of self-constraint in court societies dovetails with a greater detachment and distance from women at court and also with a rise in their power and with the development of romantic love, possibly from postponing the consummation of love and from 'a melancholy satisfaction in painful joys' (Elias 2006: 261). With regard to children, the development of self-restraints and detachment amalgamated with a spurt in their segregation and a more pointed ambivalence in the perception of children as cute and innocent on the one hand and as wicked and dangerous on the other. Romantic love and innocent children both stem from Renaissance experiences.

All this shows how interesting, fruitful and promising it would be to continue comparing the transformation that is described as the Renaissance with the transformation from formalisation to informalisation as it became dominant from the 1880s onward. I could simply follow the example set by Elias. Yet my plan to continue and expand this comparison remained unexecuted, not only because the whole project was gigantic enough to be perpetually postponed, but, more importantly, because my enthusiasm for expanding this comparison waned with the realisation that the Renaissance transformation would not be a clear-cut case of a shift in dominance from formalisation to informalisation. [11],[#N11]. The *longue durée* transformation was certainly accompanied by informalising counter-movements such as those connected with Jean-Jacques Rousseau (Elias 2006: 122–3), but the balance of formalisation and informalisation remained dominated by formalisation. Just as there is no absolute beginning or end in civilising processes and each trend in a civilising direction is always accompanied by counter-trends in de-civilising directions, and vice versa, there are no absolutes in formalising and informalising processes, but rather a balance of tensions exists between the two, with shifts in dominance that in the twentieth century produced a spiral movement towards the re-formalisation of previous informalisation as a dominant trend (Wouters 1986).

Informalisation and the necessary critical degree of preceding formalisation

At this point, one may wonder about the nature of informalisation and ask, for example, if the transformation from the Roman Empire to medieval feudalism can also be understood as informalisation. The short answer is: no. This would not be an adequate description of informalisation because the transformation towards feudalism was more like a complete 'regime change', a process of disintegration accompanied by decreasing levels of interdependence, mutual identification and mutually expected self-restraints, leading the whole civilising process and the spiral staircase of consciousness to take a downward turn to a lower level. It was, in short, a de-civilising process (Fletcher 1997; Mennell 1989). From the 1960s onward, many have expressed negative interpretations of the changes in manners and morals in terms of a de-civilising process. They saw decay, a decline or a regression of the level of civilisation. [12],[#N12]. However, the informalisation of which I speak is a different type of change. It is restricted to the informalisation of previously formalised social codes, to a controlled decontrolling of earlier formalised social controls.

A similar inference came from comparing the informalisation of social codes since the 1880s with the 'informalisation of labour relations' since the 1980s (Wouters 2007: 221–25). The latter expression surfaced in connection with the regulated deregulation of labour relations in low-wage countries, competing for the investments of global, transnational or multinational corporations. In many cases, this deregulation involved abolition of earlier regulations of the labour market that had served to provide a degree of protection against severe forms of exploitation. Increasingly large areas, eventually called *free trade zones* or *export processing zones*, were designated to attract investments from multi- and transnational corporations. Within these areas workers are explicitly forbidden the right to form unions. Usually, this deregulation was not preceded by a substantial degree of formalisation or regulation, and therefore resulted in the growth of *export processing zones*, *level playing fields* ('level' does not mean that each player has an equal chance to succeed, only that they all play by the same set of rules: the rules of their commerce) and of a dark sector of 'sweat shops' and home industry. Here we are confronted with a major, and important, similarity between the regimes of manners and labour regimes: without a critical degree of preceding formalisation, both forms of 'informalisation' tend to take a de-civilising turn, to brutalise relations, to (re-)establish principles such as 'greed is good' and 'might is right'.

Another illustration of the importance of a critical level of formalisation preceding informalisation is to be found in the difficulties faced by newcomers to informalised societies, especially those from more hierarchical societies with lower levels of social integration and control, and correspondingly lower levels of mutual identification and mutually expected self-restraints. Many or even most of these immigrants tend to experience a form of social disorientation, also called 'culture shock': their scope of identification will tend to be relatively restricted, and they will not know or recognise the mutual expectations of self-restraint pertaining among the established citizens of the country they have come to live in. From their perspective, these expectations of mutual self-restraint do not apply to them, or do so only to a lesser extent. When they have to orientate themselves to a code of manners they cannot fully understand, if only because it is not backed up by the kind of external social controls they deem necessary, they are less equipped with the social and psychic instruments and functions deemed necessary in these societies. Thus, they are overburdened, just as the people in poor countries are severely overburdened when struck by an informalisation of economic (labour) relations before the formalising of these relations has established a critical level of taken-for-granted protection.

Social and psychic integration and integration conflicts

Both individuals and survival groups need to develop a habitus with a critical level of taken-for-granted social and self-controls before a viable degree of informalisation can proceed. This is because, in processes of formalisation, social steering codes develop and levels of mutually expected self-restraints rise: individual and collective conscience formation builds up to a critical level that allows for increasing 'permissiveness', for a growing leniency in codes of manners, for increasing instead of diminishing behavioural and emotional alternatives. It is only from a critical moment in the processes of social integration and formalisation of the regimes of manners and emotions onwards, that an informalisation of manners can become a loosening and relaxation of these regimes rather than a coarsening and brutalisation. The arrival of this critical moment depends on the advance to higher levels of social integration and functional democratisation, and it is reached when a relatively high level of self-restraint has come to be taken for granted and is therefore mutually expected, thus providing protection by functioning as part of collective conscience.

In other words, the relatively high level of social integration and control that allows for such an informalisation of manners presupposes its psychic counterpart: a corresponding level of psychic integration

and an equalisation and opening of psychic relations and functions. It presupposes a collective emancipation of emotions: the rise of more open and flowing connections between a) the more direct ‘first-nature’ drives, emotions and impulses, b) the counter-impulses of conscience or ‘second nature’, and c) a rising degree of ‘third nature’ consciousness. In many respects, processes of conscience formation can be perceived as processes of psychic formalisation. From this perspective, psychic informalisation is a process in which the rulings of conscience become less rigid, less automatic, allowing for a more conscious, more flexible, and varied repertoire. This process involves a shift towards the more reflexive and flexible self-regulation of ‘third nature’.

Around the 1880s, the level of social integration and a corresponding level of taken-for-granted restraint had heightened to allow for an informalisation of manners and for its psychic reflection, a corresponding level of psychic integration. If we see processes of conscience formation largely as processes of psychic formalisation, then psychic informalisation is a process in which the rulings of conscience become less rigid, less automatic, allowing for more conscious, more flexible, and varied applications. In other words, it is a process towards a more reflexive and flexible self-regulation, also involving an emancipation of emotions, and, I repeat, this emancipation consists of increasingly open and flowing connections between (1) the more direct drives, emotions and impulses, (2) the counter-impulses of conscience or ‘second nature’, and (3) consciousness. Without the development of a critical level of psychic formalisation in a large enough part of the population, psychic informalisation in the sense of a ‘controlled decontrolling of emotional controls’ will not be controlled enough and would tend to ‘run wild’. Then, the decontrolling of psychic relations and functions can give free reign to the ‘might’ of drives and emotions, which can be dangerous for oneself as well as for others. Thus, such episodes of decontrolling emotional controls could easily lead to humiliation and annihilation, to de-civilising part-processes.

In societies or groups in which social controls are not directed strongly enough at preventing this, only those who have developed a relatively strong ‘third-nature’ type of self-steering – which may gain strength as the level of social and psychic integration and control rises – are able to prevent it from happening. In confrontations between old established groups and groups of outsiders such as immigrants from countries where power balances are relatively unequal, the strength of the level and spread of ‘third-nature’ type personalities is put to the test. Hans-Peter Waldhoff (1995) has demonstrated extensively how in these clashes, members of the established groups are confronted with the ‘weaknesses’ that go hand in hand with strong forms of inequality. These weaknesses had been removed from their relations to such an extent that they thought they had overcome them (cf. Wouters 1998). Therefore, they risk ‘flying into a rage’ that threatens their existing levels of mutual identification, informalisation, and ‘civilisation’.

These confrontations are social and psychic integration conflicts. On the social level, they entail the emancipation and integration of lower classes within nation-states and the integration of rich and poor countries and their inhabitants within continental and global networks. On the psychic level they involve emancipation and integration of ‘lower’ emotions and impulses within personality structures.

Two sequential long-term processes of formalisation and informalisation

A few years ago, I started to think of the evolution from mammals to hominoids and then *Homo sapiens* as an example of informalisation, albeit of a very different type. But the project of comparing the informalisation of social and psychic codes with evolutionary informalisation would not only be even more gigantic than the Renaissance project, it would also require facing the difficulties of the ‘evolutionary emergence of social

processes from biological processes' (Quilley 2007: xiii). Nevertheless, in what follows, I will try to present an outline and a rough comparison of these two transitions in dominance from formalisation to informalisation, one at the evolutionary level of speciation and the other at the level of social and psychic developments since the advent of *Homo sapiens*.

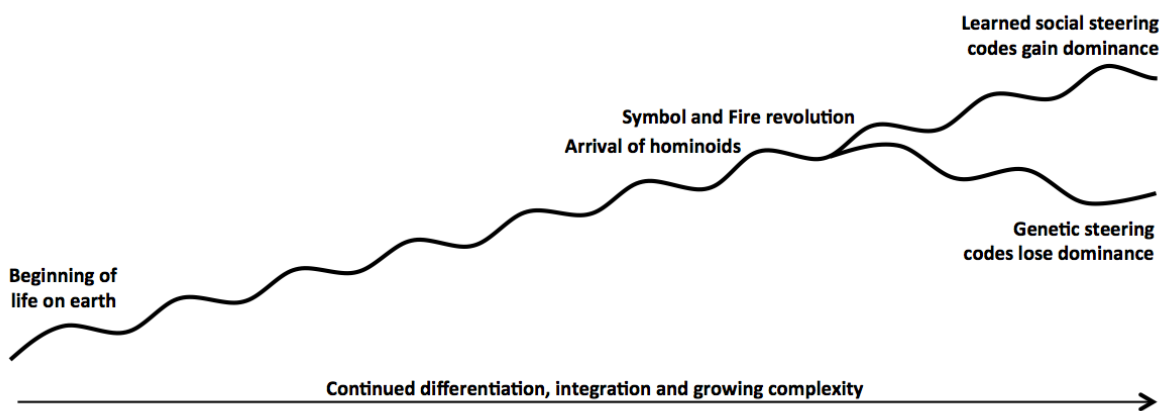
From the earliest stages of life on earth, living organisms and species were equipped with relatively simple and fixed innate steering codes and mechanisms regulating their behaviour. Although increasingly detailed and expanding, their innate steering codes allowed only a limited range of flexibility and little or no social learning or consciousness. Learning and consciousness are mentioned together here because most, or even all, collective learning processes probably demand at least a basic form of consciousness. Over about four billion years, before vertebrates, mammals, hominoids and *Homo sapiens* developed, the formation of animate structures went towards an increasing variety of different forms of life with rising levels of functional differentiation, integration and complexity. [13].[#N13].Therefore, this long period in the evolution of forms of life and speciation can be understood as a long-term phase in which *evolutionary formalisation* prevailed. This phase gradually gave way to the transition from hominoids to *Homo sapiens*, a development in which innate steering codes lost some of their former dominance to collectively learned social steering codes. This development raises the following question: 'Did the process of evolution change direction? Indeed, these changes together imply that, in the case of humans, there was a change of direction in the process of evolution: *evolutionary informalisation* came to prevail over evolutionary formalisation. Together with becoming much more socially malleable, people developed levels of collective learning and consciousness that allowed for an emancipation of symbols (Elias 2011), a 'symbols revolution' that together with a 'fire revolution' (Goudsblom 1992) enlarged the surplus of knowledge and power of humans over their predecessors. Thus, the balance of power between patterns of biological evolutionary steering codes and patterns of socially learned and transmitted steering codes changed in favour of the latter.

Evolutionary formalisation is a phase in which all forms of life and their innate steering codes changed towards differentiation, expansion and specification, but they continued to lead to relatively rigid and fixed behaviours, limited and repetitious to the extent that they did not allow any species enough collective learning for 'civilisation' or 'history' to develop. The further back one goes into the evolutionary past, the more fixed and limited the biological/genetically inherited nature of organisms and species become: literally encoded by DNA molecules. Although these species and their constituent cells are in constant flux, the range of possible changes was limited and did not allow for civilisation and history, or in any case, not appreciably. With humans, however, there is always civilisation and there is always history. People cannot do without civilisation: it is their survival menu. Survival chances depend heavily on learning social codes and mechanisms of self-regulation. Any such survival menu consists of social codes or models of steering behaviour and regulating emotions. These models may vary and change within the species according to the history and development of a specific social group, yet without social steering codes, people are lost. They would lack control of vital information such as what is dangerous to do or to eat and what is not. In order to survive, humans *have* to learn these codes, and they *have* to constrain themselves, each other and their children to that purpose. And only humans are *able* to learn these steering codes, no other species can (or only to a comparably much lower extent).

At a critical moment in this blind process of evolutionary formalisation, driven by natural selection and the random mutation of genes, its direction partly changed, but not to the extent of destruction or deformation. On the contrary, it gained viability as the innate steering codes of some of the more developed and complicated forms of living organism became less fixed and more open to variation and change by collective learning – heralding the arrival of hominoids (about 30 million years ago) and *Homo sapiens* (up to about 200,000 or 300,000 years ago). There would have been a limited degree of 'decontrolling of innate steering

controls', together with the formation of an innate capacity to learn to speak, think and remember. This development towards greater plasticity and flexibility of steering capacity facilitated by social learning can be conceptualised as an *evolutionary informalisation* of previously formalised innate steering codes and innate means of orientation. In this process, biogenetic codes lost steering power to psycho- and sociogenetic codes. The steering codes and means of orientation of humans came to depend more and more on collectively learned social codes and symbols as means of communication.

The following graph represents the formalisation and informalisation of innate steering codes as phases in evolutionary processes. An ascending line from left to right represents increasing differentiation (variety), integration and complexity of the forms of life and their (innate) steering codes. This line bifurcates at about the time of the arrival of hominoids, representing increasingly less dominating innate steering codes and their growing plasticity, allowing for collective social learning and an expansion of socially inherited steering codes. This bifurcation represents the transition in dominance from evolutionary formalisation to evolutionary informalisation. [14],[#N14]



[\[h/humfig/images/11217607.0006.106-00000003.png\]](#)

As learned social steering codes gained dominance, these codes became involved in a process of formalisation: they expanded, becoming both more specific and more demanding of self-regulation. During a huge leap across time, this formalisation of social codes continued to be dominant. Counter-movements were restricted and temporary until the second half of the nineteenth century, when an informalisation of social steering codes became dominant, while at the same time, demands on self-regulation continued to rise. This later bifurcation is depicted in the graph representing the formalisation and informalisation of social codes, as shown in the section 'Excursus: Norbert Elias and informalisation'.

The importance of communication and symbols as instruments of orientation and survival is evident from the biogenetic changes towards an increasingly complicated muscle structure of human faces, which allows a far greater range of expression than any other species: 'The face evolved into a signalling board' (Elias 2009: 155; cf. Schröter 2002). In comparison, the facial muscles of all other species are nowhere near as flexible, and far more rigid and fixed. The articulation and sophistication of facial and throat muscles, needed for speaking, laughing, crying and other forms of communication via gestures, gesticulations and sounds, relate to the evolution of inherited codes giving rise to an innate equipment for learning various social means of expression such as language and other formalised body signals. [15],[#N15] Formalised signals and symbols had significant

survival functions for human groups. The ability to learn and remember collectively is at the root of the transformation of direct and rather unarticulated sounds into the symbols of a language. The ability to learn a language must at some point in time have developed into a genetically given possibility. These changes in genetically transmitted equipment strongly underline the survival importance of social communication and its means, and it also shows the high level of functional integration or synthesis that humans have attained in their physical, psychical and social equipment.

The change towards a regulation of behaviour and emotions dominated by collectively learned steering codes was twofold. First, the ability to learn social codes had become genetically given. That is, it had become part of the informalised 'nature' of humans, which meant that human babies had acquired a high degree of inborn plasticity. Second, this plasticity in turn meant that babies and children needed to be subjected to external and internal social controls, without which a young child would soon die. Both the ability to, and the necessity to learn social and individual steering codes were inherent in the evolutionary informalisation, the change of human 'nature' resulting in humans' dependency on the social regulation of love-and-learn processes. Their 'first nature' always involves being subjected to external and internal controls (Elias 2009a).

The flexibility that came with the ability of humans to learn to speak, think and remember was a basic condition for the take-off of human 'history' and 'civilisation'. It was the take-off of a long-term development among humans, a 'history' in which the balance of 'nature and nurture' changed in favour of nurture. More precisely formulated, changes in the 'triad of controls', the three inescapable forms of dependence and control, moved in the direction of higher levels of control by humans over extra-human nature, over each other, and over themselves via self-control. It shows why, in all their variety, the collection of social steering codes of a human survival group can be summarised as its civilisation or culture. Changes in these codes go hand in hand with changes in civilisation and history, for example in the civilisation and history of communicating (languages and other formalised symbols), of organising the use of fire and land (the fire and the agrarian revolutions), and of a great many regime changes such as from the Roman Empire to feudalism, feudalism to court societies, and court societies to nation-states.

The transition in dominance from the relatively long-term phase of evolutionary formalisation to a shorter-term phase of informalisation involved the human species being more dependent on socially learned steering codes than on innate codes, and therefore, their greater dependence on learning these codes. In this process, as the possibility of learning to speak, think and remember developed together with the necessity to do so, innate steering codes and 'instinctive' means of orientation lost some of their compelling power over humans. An example is given by Elias when discussing the living conditions of stone-age people, characterised by 'a higher danger level perpetuating a high affect- and fantasy-level of knowledge and beliefs, and a low level of danger-control thus maintaining exposure to dangers at a high level':

Humans at that stage lived like the wild animals they hunted, always on the alert. They lacked the protection of a specific inborn reaction pattern to dangers. Instead, they had a generalised inborn alarm reaction, putting them into a different gear, ready for strenuous action such as flight or fight. But the actual decision as to what to do, what skeletal muscles to move, had to be taken at the non-automatic cerebral levels, patterned by collective and individual experiences of past dangers stored in the memory. (Elias 2007: 131)

It is from this perspective that the development towards hominoids and *Homo sapiens* was a partial change in the direction of evolutionary processes: no longer an expansion of innate steering equipment characteristic of the evolutionary formalising process, but rather a reduction, a weakening of the power of genetic structures. Was it a partial evolutionary regression?

Before hominoids, random mutations in the direction of a weakening of genetic steering codes may have occurred within many species, but they would have had no chance of survival without a corresponding degree of social learning capacity. Nor would the other possibility stand a chance of survival: random mutations providing an increased innate capacity for social learning would remain rather sterile without a corresponding spread of love-and-learn relationships characterised by a rise in the level of intensity. With humans, this seems to have been the case: in human babies and children the bioprocess of maturation continuously dovetails with a social process of learning social steering codes. Expanding possibilities for collective learning and consciousness went hand in hand with a weakening of rigid innate codes, thus developing away from the fixed innate codes of their predecessors in the direction of comparably flexible social codes. In sum, humans represent a biological, psychical and social synthesis of the highest level, a synthesis that came about in an evolutionary process of informalisation. What might appear as an evolutionary regression was in fact an enormous source of power and identity for subsequent generations of humans in relation to other species.

As collective learning brought expanding reservoirs of knowledge, social codes based upon them came to prevail over unlearned inherited codes and unlearned 'spontaneous' emotions. In addition, social codes came to be based more and more on learned ways of how to interfere with 'nature'. The regulation and steering of behaviour and emotions occurred increasingly by *formalising social codes* (and their expansion and articulation) as well as by an increasingly authoritative (and authoritarian) conscience. With it came the domination of the human species over other forms of life on earth: survival and rule of the organised 'smartest' – the rise in the level of human controls over non-human nature, a rising level of human interdependency, if only because of the growing necessity to organise and communicate, and rising levels of flexibility and reflectivity as well as rising demands on self-regulation. Together, these changes in the triad of controls propelled the expansion of the anthroposphere within the biosphere (Goudsblom 2002).

In important ways, the formalisation of social steering codes continued in similar fashion to evolutionary formalisation: in both processes, steering codes became increasingly detailed and both entailed expanding levels of differentiation, integration, expansion and complexity. In this crucial respect they proceeded hand in hand: the formalisation of social steering codes involved a continuation of what had been an evolutionary informalisation. In the long run, another critical phase of formalisation emerged in which collective learning processes and the development of an expanding body of social steering codes enabled a partial change of direction: more options and greater (conscious) flexibility of behaviour and feeling gradually emerged. As we have seen, expanding levels of functional differentiation, integration, and complexity went hand in hand with rising levels of interdependency and with functional as well as institutional democratisation, eventually allowing for the flexibility, knowledge (learning) and consciousness that were of critical importance for the relatively recent upswing to dominance of an *informalisation of social and psychic codes*.

From the end of the nineteenth century onwards, many people have interpreted the transition in dominance from the formalisation of social codes to their informalisation as a weakening of 'civilisation': they saw the partial change of direction in formalisation processes as a weakening of social codes and controls, and in that sense as a regression, not an evolutionary regression, of course, but a regression of social and psychic steering codes, and sometimes even of steering capacities. A related similarity is that they did not consider this partial change of direction from formalisation to informalisation as an expansion and a further differentiation of social codes. Nor did they see how social controls became increasingly focused on self-controls, thus maintaining the conditions for the advanced flexibility and reflexivity of social and psychic informalisation.

My research findings suggest the conclusion that, in the phase of informalisation of social codes, what was initially seen as relative weakness was again and again transformed into the strength of an advance in consciousness, in 'presence of mind', in flexibility and the ability to live up to rising demands on self-

regulation. These demands emerged as relatively fixed and rigid social codes turned into yielding guidelines for choosing from a widening spectrum of behavioural and emotional options. Here we find another similarly with evolutionary informalisation: this transformation also demanded from hominoids and *Homo sapiens* the strength of an advanced consciousness, 'presence of mind', and flexibility. In addition, as rather fixed innate codes lost their dominance to the social control of collectively learned social codes, hominoids and humans also had to live up to rising demands of self-regulation.

So far, I have outlined how the transition of both the evolutionary and social formalisation into an informalisation of biogenetic codes, psycho- and sociogenetic codes is related to the rise of biological, social and psychic differentiation and integration (and to the connected rise of survival chances) to critical levels of magnitude. Over the last 150 years, approximately, a social process of informalisation has occurred that bears striking similarities with what has happened earlier on an evolutionary (biological) level.

Two transitions from formalisation to informalisation: a theoretical comparison

An important similarity of both transitions from formalisation to informalisation seems to be that the 'synthesis of parts on many levels, through division of functions' (Elias 2007, 188) had advanced to a critical level. In both transitions, a critically advanced level of differentiation and integration of (survival) units and of interdependency networks expanding in size and density was necessary, before the involved steering regimes – of innate steering mechanisms and of social and psychological regimes of manners and emotions – allowed for informalisation to become dominant. This advancing synthesis of part-units functioning on advancing levels of integration seems to be of crucial importance for both moments of transition.

The evolution of animalic life first proceeded towards an expansion of genetic equipment in the form of rather fixed innate behavioural patterns until this expansion/growth in hominoids and then humans reached (1) a *critical level of functional differentiation and integration*, [16].[#N16] and (2) a *critical level of survival chances: of the levels of material security and physical safety*. Combined, these two elements provoked a twist in the process: first in hominoids and then in modern humans, innate steering codes lost some rigidity and gained in plasticity and complexity, eventually allowing for expanding possibilities and options to adjust more flexibly to changing conditions of life. In this process, the emancipation of symbols and the domestication of fire (Goudsblom 1992) were of major importance. Control over fire went hand in hand with the ability to eat cooked food, which was probably instrumental in the development of shorter intestines and walking upright (Wrangham 2010). Fire control made humans less dependent on the alterations of day and night, seasonal changes, wet and cold. Moreover, 'heating, lighting and cooking all contributed to what we would now call a higher standard of living' and 'provides us with an excellent example of how new forms of behaviour may change the balance of power – in this case between humans and all other animals' and how the latter:

could engender changes in habitus, both among the humans who gained greater self-confidence from the presence of fire in their groups and among animals that might be bigger and stronger than humans but had learned to respect and fear their agility with fire. (Goudsblom 2002: 29–30)

From this perspective, it seems quite probable that the emancipation of symbols and the domestication of fire, both for its use as a weapon and as an instrument in the production (forging) of increasingly efficient weapons, have proceeded as twin processes over the same period of time.

Two similar part-processes occurred in the informalisation process of social codes, which became dominant in the richer countries of the West from around 1880 onwards: (1) the *level of functional differentiation and integration* – in this case: social and psychic integration – reached a critical density and complexity, which coincided with (2) reaching critical *levels of material security and physical safety: survival chances*. There was an unparalleled rise in the standard of living and in expectations, trust, confidence and self-confidence, propelling increasing numbers of people to break with old codes and prevailing traditions. The trend toward further expansion and specification of codes and patterns for steering behaviour and emotions gave way and lost its dominance to the trend of increasingly flexible and reflexive regimes of manners and emotions. Firmly rooted traditions were uprooted, but on the whole in ways that can be characterised as ‘controlled decontrolling of emotional controls’. They turned out to be spurts in informalising and civilising processes. Apparently, a critical level of taken-for-granted social controls and self-controls, and a habitus of self-confidence that develops with material security, social safety and trust, was another necessary condition for this informalisation to proceed.

In other words, in comparing the two transitions, similar process drivers come into view: both transitions seem to be dependent on extensive and intensive growth [17][#N17] – growth in functional differentiation, integration and complexity, and on reaching the threshold condition of critical levels of material security and physical safety. In pre-human evolutionary processes, this growth involved all living organisms and species, based on natural selection, gene transmission and gene mutations, and also ongoing differentiation and integration, or, in other words, growing competition and interweaving. In the developmental sequence from vertebrates to mammals, hominoids to *Homo sapiens*, the ongoing process comes to depend increasingly on transmission and innovation of learned knowledge with the help of symbols, particularly linguistic symbols. On the whole, however, the process of an advancing synthesis of part-units functioning on advancing levels of integration was predominantly blind. Although social processes have directions, writes Elias, ‘they, like nature, have neither purposes nor goals. Purposes and goals may possibly be achieved by human beings if, as humanity, they agree on them one day’ (2009c: 8).

The survival of evolutionary informalising ‘mutations’ (in the direction of greater plasticity or relatively less fixed and more flexible innate steering codes) needed a critical level of dovetailing between the increase of learning potential and the decline of innate fixedness. As steering codes diminished in rigidity, evolutionary informalisation coincided with a relative weakening of the condition of new born babies. Compared to (other) newly born animals, they remained longer and more strongly dependent upon love-and-learn relationships and processes, in which their relative weakness is converted into strength, into a lead in consciousness and manoeuvrability. A similar change can be said to have occurred in the informalisation of social codes. These changes also entailed strong pressures towards a major increase in flexibility and for levels of consciousness to rise to the next step on the spiral staircase of consciousness. On the level of humans, the change from formal and rather fixed steering mechanisms to more flexible and therefore informal ones, was also a ‘relational turn’ in the sense that steering came to depend less upon inner or internalised codes, whether genetically or socially inherited, and more upon the (type of) relations. In Riesman’s terms, there was a transition from inner-directed to other-directed personalities and steering codes.

Both evolutionary and social processes of growing differentiation, integration, complexity and formalisation were spurred by survival struggles and elimination contests in which ‘fewer and fewer will control more and more opportunities, and more and more units will be eliminated from the competition’. As a rule, elimination from the competition coincides with an interweaving of increasingly large (survival) units, a ‘competition and intertwining’ mechanism, also known as ‘the monopoly mechanism’ (Elias 2012a: 303, 301). In the process, many or even all traces of the eliminated units disappear and enter oblivion: ‘In retrospect, people frequently

see only the apparently smooth progress of technology, and not the elimination struggles behind it, which consume human beings' (Elias 2009: 8).

So far, my comparison of the two phases of formalisation and informalisation in evolutionary processes and in human social processes has pointed to a complex of interrelated conditions for the two transitions in dominance from one phase to the other to occur, and to a comparable complex of process drivers. Their similar dynamics emphasises the extent to which both processes are 'blind', proceeding independently of the wishes and aims of all groups and individuals involved. [18][#N18] Attempts at understanding this similarity may instigate a rise in the level of detachment and a greater awareness of how closely processes of social and psychic integration are interwoven with those of social and psychic informalisation.

In addition to the evidence presented earlier in this article and elsewhere, Abram de Swaan has presented another type of evidence that demonstrates the importance of this transition. In his study of 'killing compartments' he observed that the spread of the very conditions which had enabled the Nazi concentration and extermination camps was in fact incompatible with informalisation, a process akin to what De Swaan characterised as a 'shift from relational and emotional management through command to a management through negotiation' (2001: 270). Formalised societies such as Nazi Germany tend to foster strong and inflexible types of social and self-control that are relatively rigid:

Very elaborate codes of conduct and expression will be maintained to the smallest detail, until the moment that one steps over the threshold and into the compartment of barbarity, where all cruelty and wildness are permitted, until one leaves this reservation again and resumes one's controlled demeanour, *as if nothing had ever happened* (de Swaan 2001: *ibid.*, original emphasis).

Since the long-term dominance of the process of formalisation was subdued by one of informalisation, subsequent spurts of social and psychic informalisation have increasingly prevented the very conditions for these forms of social and psychic compartmentalisation to spread. The existence of a compartment of cruelty and fury demonstrates the absence of a standard of controls with 'greater evenness and all-roundness in all, not only in some situations' and 'removed from extremes' (Elias in Wouters 2007: 232–3). This means that only from a certain level onwards in the expansion and density of interdependency networks do social controls and steering codes exclude compartmentalisation as a social and psychic defence mechanism. It also helps to understand how closely processes of social and psychic integration are interwoven with those of social and psychic informalisation, together with *controlled decontrolling of emotional controls* and the *emancipation of emotions*.

Nowadays, the strength of social informalisation and its 'third-nature' habitus is put to the test in confrontations *within* nation-states between established groups and groups of outsiders such as immigrants from countries where power balances are relatively unequal. It is also tested in confrontations *between* nation-states, particularly between old established ones and rising outsider nation-states. In many old established nation-states, another source of confrontations stems from a rise in social inequalities resulting from a relative weakening of the power of politicians and their political centres in comparison to the power of those who are organised and represented in increasingly global monetary organisations and centres. The power of the latter is easily and rapidly expanding beyond state borders and state regulations, whereas political power is still being largely restricted to nation-states. These are integration gaps and integration conflicts. From the possible outcome of these and other integration conflicts such as those between humans and non-human nature, many possible futures arise. Johan Goudeblom writes: 'In 1987 Elias mentioned three

possible futures for humankind: a nuclear war; world hegemony by one state; a world-wide federation of states.’ And he continues: ‘These possibilities do not rule each other out; we can even imagine a succession in time’. [19][#N19]. Much will depend on the spread and the levels of functional differentiation, integration and complexity of human survival groups. In addition, their level of informalisation will make a crucial difference.

I thank Jon Fletcher for his friendship, shown on this occasion by helping me write this article and correcting my English. I thank Richard Kilminster for support and understanding, and Andrew Linklater, Stephen Vertigans and Arjan Post for stimulating comments. I have learned from discussions with evolutionary biologist Bart Voorzanger, and physicist Paul Rump even helped me to understand my own paper better.

References

- Elias, Norbert (2006 [1969]) *The Court Society*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 2. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Elias, Norbert (2007 [1979]) ‘Reflections on the great evolution’, in *Involvement and Detachment*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 8. Dublin: UCD Press, pp. 179–233.
- Elias, Norbert (2008 [1988]) ‘Introduction’ in Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilising Process*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 7. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Elias, Norbert (2008a [1980]) ‘The civilising of parents.’ In *Essays II. On Civilising Processes, State Formation and National Identity*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias Vol. 15. Dublin: UCD Press, pp. 14–40.
- Elias, Norbert (2009 [1987]) ‘On Human Beings and Their Emotions: a process-sociological essay’, in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 16. Dublin: UCD Press: pp. 141–158.
- Elias, Norbert (2009a [1982]) ‘Scientific establishments’, in *Essays I. On the Sociology of Knowledge and the Sciences*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 14. Dublin: UCD Press, pp. 107–160.
- Elias, Norbert (2009b [1988]) ‘Civilisation and Psychosomatics’, in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 16. Dublin: UCD Press, pp. 180–86.
- Elias, Norbert (2009c [1986]) ‘Social processes’, in *Essays III: On Sociology and the Humanities*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 16. Dublin: UCD Press: pp. 4–8.
- Elias, Norbert (2010 [1979]) *The Loneliness of the Dying*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 6. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Elias, Norbert (2011 [1989]) *The Symbol Theory*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias Vol. 13. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Elias, Norbert (2012a [1939]) *On the Process of Civilisation. Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 3. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Elias, Norbert (2012b [1970]) *What is Sociology?* The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 5. Dublin: UCD Press.

- Elias, Norbert (2013a [1989]) *Studies on the Germans*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 11. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Elias, Norbert (2013b) *Interviews and Autobiographical Reflections*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias, Vol. 17. Dublin: UCD Press.
- Fletcher, Jonathan (1997) *Violence & Civilisation. An Introduction to the Work of Norbert Elias*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Goudsblom, Johan (1992) *Fire and Civilisation*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.
- Goudsblom, Johan (2002) 'Introductory Overview: the Expanding Anthroposphere', in B. de Vries and J. Goudsblom (eds) *Mappae Mundi*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 21–46.
- Goudsblom, Johan (2002) 'The past 250 years: Industrialisation and globalisation,' in B. de Vries and J. Goudsblom (eds) *Mappae Mundi*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, pp. 352–378.
- Kilminster, Richard (2007) *Norbert Elias. Post-philosophical sociology*. New York: Routledge.
- Mennell, Stephen (1989) 'Short-Term Interests and Long-Term Processes: the Case of Civilisation and Decivilisation', in S. J. Mennell, E. L. Jones and J. Goudsblom *Human History and Social Process*. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, pp 93–127.
- Quilley, Stephen (2007) 'Note on the text', in: Norbert Elias, *Involvement and Detachment*. The Collected Works of Norbert Elias. Vol. 8. Dublin: UCD Press, pp. xi–xvi.
- Quilley, Stephen (2010) 'Integrative levels and "the Great Evolution": Organicist biology and the sociology of Norbert Elias.' *Journal of Classical Sociology* 10; pp. 391–419.
- Rammler, Stephan (2008) 'The *Wahlverwantschaft* of Modernity and Mobility', in W. Canzler, V. Kaufmann and S. Kesselring (eds) *Tracing Mobilities: towards a cosmopolitan perspective*. Aldershot/Burlington: Ashgate, pp. 57–76.
- Riesman, David, N. Glazer and R. Denney (1950) *The Lonely Crowd*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Schröter, Michael (2002) 'Wer lacht, kann nicht beißen. Ein unveröffentlichter *Essay on Laughter* von Norbert Elias'. *Merkur* Vol. 56, pp. 860-873.
- Steele, Valerie (2001) *The Corset – A Cultural history*. New Haven: Yale UP.
- Swaan, Abram de (2001) 'Dyscivilisation, mass Extermination and the state', *Theory, Culture & Society*, 18: pp. 265–76.
- Veeninga, Djoeke (2008) *Het Nahuwelijk*. Amsterdam: Augustus.
- Waldhoff, Hans-Peter (1995) *Fremde und Zivilisierung*. Frankfurt/M: Suhrkamp.
- Waldhoff, Hans-Peter (2014) 'Menschen im singular und im plural – Norbert Elias' grundlagentheoretischer Beitrag zur Gruppenanalyse.' In *Gruppenpsychotherapie und Gruppendynamik. Zeitschrift für Theorie und Praxis der Gruppenanalyse*. 50: 2, pp. 111–145.
- Wouters, Cas (1976) 'Is het civilisatieproces van richting veranderd?' *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 3: pp. 336–60.
- Wouters, Cas (1977) 'Informalisation and the civilising process', in P.R. Gleichmann, J. Goudsblom and H. Korte (eds) *Human Figurations, Essays for/Aufsätze für Norbert Elias*. Amsterdam: Stichting Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift, pp. 437–456.

- Wouters, Cas (1986) 'Formalisation and informalisation: changing tension balances in civilising processes', *Theory, Culture & Society* 3: pp. 1–19.
- Wouters, Cas (1990) 'Social stratification and informalisation in global perspective.' *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7: pp. 69–90.
- Wouters, Cas (1998) 'How strange to ourselves are our feelings of superiority and inferiority.' *Theory, Culture & Society* 15: pp. 131–50.
- Wouters, Cas (2002) 'The quest for new rituals in dying and mourning: changes in the we–I balance.' *Body & Society*, 8: pp. 1–27.
- Wouters, Cas (2004) *Sex and Manners: Female Emancipation in the West since 1890*. London: Sage.
- Wouters, Cas (2007) *Informalisation: Manners and Emotions since 1890*. London: Sage.
- Wouters, Cas (2014) 'Universally applicable criteria for doing figurational process sociology: seven balances, one triad', *Human Figurations: Long-term Perspectives on the Human Condition*. 3: 1.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0003.106> [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0003.106>]
- Wouters, Cas (2016a) 'Towards an integration of lust and love? eroticisation and sexualisation since the 1880s', *Human Figurations: Long-term Perspectives on the Human Condition*. 5: 1.
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.105> [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.105>]
- Wouters, Cas (2016b) 'Functional democratisation and disintegration as side-effects of differentiation and integration processes.' *Human Figurations: Long-term Perspectives on the Human Condition*. 5: 2
<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.208> [<http://hdl.handle.net/2027/spo.11217607.0005.208>]
- Wrangham, Richard (2010) *Catching Fire: How Cooking Made Us Human*. London: Profile Books.

Biographical note:

Cas Wouters is a sociologist who has elaborated his theory of informalisation in a variety of studies of nineteenth- and twentieth-century social and psychic processes, focusing mainly on the regimes of manners and emotions in dying and mourning, in relationships between classes, sexes, and generations. This focus demonstrated the many faces of an informalisation of manners and an 'emancipation of emotions'. These studies have resulted in numerous articles and books. His study of changes in German, Dutch, English and American manners books resulted in two monographs, 'twins': *Sex and Manners: Female Emancipation in the West 1890–2000* (2004) and *Informalization: Manners and Emotions since 1890* (2007), both translated into Dutch and Chinese.

1. An earlier version of this article was published in: Waldhoff, Hans-Peter; Morgenroth, Christine; Moré, Angela; Kopel, Michael (eds), *Wo denken wir hin? Lebensthemen, Zivilisationsprozesse, demokratische Verantwortung*. Gießen: Psychosozial-Verlag, 2015, pp. 261–296. [\[#N1-ptri\]](#)
2. With the concepts of 'love and learn' relationships, generating 'love-and-learn' processes, Elias (2009) implicitly recognised that, for understanding the history of humanity at large as well as the history of any particular society, studying the history of love is as important as studying the history of learning. The two are closely connected, because the learning of individuals, as well as their collective and intergenerational learning, depends upon the strength and warmth of their bonds, upon the quality of love in their relationships, particularly those involving children. See also Wouters (2016a). [\[#N2-ptri\]](#)

3. Two related obstacles to wider recognition are obvious. The first occurs when changes in regimes of manners and emotions are experienced as either too constraining or not constraining enough, and they are duly perceived and discussed predominantly in a moral framework. Their direction, if discussed at all, becomes part of a moral contest, which means that they are also addressed mainly in terms of good or bad, which, as a rule, blocks a more detached perspective. Changes involving the balance of power between groups of outsiders such as workers, women, children, young people, black people vis-à-vis their established groups provide many examples of becoming subjected to a moral contest. The second obstacle occurs when changes that were once contested are in the process of becoming accepted and taken for granted. In this case, raising them is usually experienced as embarrassing, so they are therefore mollified – ‘let bygones be bygones’. Thus, they remain unconnected to a broader theoretical framework capturing more encompassing social and psychic processes. At a later stage, when the changes have become ‘history’, they lose their power to stir up emotions – the thrill has disappeared. See also note 18. [↗\[#N3-ptri\]](#)
4. On this Eliasian concept and processes of functional democratisation, see Wouters (2016b). [↗\[#N4-ptri\]](#)
5. I use the term ‘first nature’ to refer to the urges and affects that stem from the ‘animalic nature’ that human beings share with many other animals: vertebrates, mammals and especially primates. This ‘animalic nature’ is not ahistorical and immutable: ‘The libidinal energies which one encounters in any living human being are always already socially processed; they are, in other words, sociogenetically transformed in their function and structure, and can in no way be separated from the corresponding ego and superego structures [...] What matters, what determines conduct, are the balances and conflicts between people’s malleable drives and the built-in drive-controls’ (Elias 2012a: 452). [↗\[#N5-ptri\]](#)
6. The informalisation of social steering codes is not restricted to the wealthier countries of the West, but in non-Western societies these codes are compartmentalised, prevailing only or mainly within established circles and is not dominant outside of them. This regularity shows how strongly the level of informalisation in a society depends on its level of integration. [↗\[#N6-ptri\]](#)
7. The word ‘regained’ cannot be taken literally, of course, as emotions that find more direct or less reflected expression in behaviour differ from emotions that find access into a type of consciousness that allows for processing them into a large variety of ways of expressing and/or repressing them. Emotions have three components: (a) a behavioural component, (b) a feeling component, and (c) and a physical component, respectively referring to social/relational processes, psychic, and biological processes. [↗\[#N7-ptri\]](#)
8. Acknowledging this impossibility, we can only further our understanding through a comparative study of the processes preceding the long-term formalisation and informalisation of social and psychic steering codes, that is, to look at the evolution of *innate codes* and patterns for steering behavior and emotions. [↗\[#N8-ptri\]](#)
9. Elias believed not to have used his expression ‘controlled de-controlling of emotional controls’ in any publication before 1986, for in that year, on one of our weekly walks, he told me without further ado that, now that he had published it in *Quest*, I was henceforth obliged to refer to this work when I use it again. I was so bewildered that it took me until our next walk before I could bite back. Then I forced him to the point of realising that it would really have been more appropriate to have provided a note to this expression, indicating that I had made fruitful use of it over many years. He promised to produce such a note at the next opportunity. See Wouters (2007: 230–37). [↗\[#N9-ptri\]](#)
10. In discussing informalisation in this essay, Elias adds two useful concepts: he distinguishes between the *formality–informality span* of a society – which concerns the *synchronic* gradient between formality and informality – and the *formality–informality gradient* observed in the course of social development, the *diachronic* gradient of informalisation (2013a [1978]: 32). [↗\[#N10-ptri\]](#)
11. The same view appears in Elias’s observation: ‘In earlier cases, such as the period we call Renaissance, the phase of experimentation with new relational forms and rules merged with a phase of consolidation,

under the aegis of established groups which also wished to consolidate their domination' (2008: 34; cf. pp. 259–64).[♣][\[#N11-ptr1\]](#)

12. Sometimes Elias also tended towards a negative interpretation, for example when he made the 'didactic drawing' included above that shows a decline of self-controls since the late nineteenth century.
[♣][\[#N12-ptr1\]](#)
13. The formative processes of social differentiation and integration were a major focus of most sociological classics of the nineteenth century, particularly Herbert Spencer, whose formula of evolution, as taken from his *First Principles* [1862], has reached the public via the World Wide Web – http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/Outline_of_Great_Books_Volume_I/ [http://www.publicbookshelf.com/public_html/Outline_of_Great_Books_Volume_I/] – and is paraphrased in recent books, for example: 'Evolution proceeds from an indefinite incoherent homogeneity to a definite coherent heterogeneity through continuous differentiation and integration' (Rammler 2008: 64). To see societies as an integrative level irreducible to the previous physical, chemical and biological levels became the general view among biologists such as Julian Huxley, Joseph Needham and others grouped in the 1940s as the 'modern synthesis' in evolutionary theory (see Kilminster 2007, Quilley 2010).
[♣][\[#N13-ptr1\]](#)
14. This drawing is homocentric in the sense that it focuses on humans and more or less disregards other animals. However, to include other animals would complicate the graph enormously. It would be quite a challenge to draw a line representing the diminishing of various forms of animal life, a process that went more or less hand in hand with the expanding anthroposphere within the biosphere. The growing domination of humans on earth went hand in hand with the decreasing survival chances of many other forms of life, and sometimes included their extermination by humans. This process became increasingly significant after the domestication of fire and of plants and animals (the agrarian revolution), but particularly after the industrial revolution.[♣][\[#N14-ptr1\]](#)
15. Human hands have also developed a muscular system with a far higher level of differentiation and co-ordination than any of the great apes.[♣][\[#N15-ptr1\]](#)
16. 'Growing differentiation and a growing capacity for co-ordination and integration are complementary processes in the bio-organisation. Neither of them can advance from one phase to the next if the other does not keep pace' (Elias 2007 [1979]: 231–32).[♣][\[#N16-ptr1\]](#)
17. 'Key words for extensive growth: more and more, further and further. The key term for intensive growth is "greater complexity"' (Goudsblom 2002: 403).[♣][\[#N17-ptr1\]](#)
18. This 'blindness' partly explains why the significance of the transition in social steering codes has remained generally unacknowledged. See also note 3.[♣][\[#N18-ptr1\]](#)
19. Quoted from Goudsblom's 'thirteen propositions about possible futures', formulated for the Leicester College Court Conference 'From the Past to the Present and Towards Possible Futures', 20–22 June 2014.[♣][\[#N19-ptr1\]](#)

Hosted by [Michigan Publishing](#), a division of the [University of Michigan Library](#).

For more information please contact mplib-help@umich.edu.

Online ISSN: 2166-6644